THE NEO-VAIṢṆAVITE MOVEMENT
AND
THE SATRA INSTITUTION OF ASSAM

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S. N. SARMA, M.A., D.Phil.

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Presented to Dr. B. N. Puri with deep regard.

Srisarma
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By

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TO THE SACRED MEMORY
OF MY FATHER

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Gauhati University in the Department of Publication, besides publishing books of popular and technical nature, has pleasure in undertaking to publish theses approved by this University for Doctorate Degree under the Scheme of Publication of Research works including Doctoral Theses financed by the University Grants Commission, and Dr S. N. Sarma's *The Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and the Satra Institutions of Assam*, which was approved by Gauhati University for Doctor of Philosophy (D. Phil) Degree in 1955, has been included in the series of such publications.

We need hardly impress upon the class of readers interested in the study of such works that the publication of works like this will go a long way to stimulate thinking in regard to the evaluation of our resourceful past and the heritage we acclaim.

We are thankful to the University Grants Commission but for whose policy of material encouragement towards publication of scholarly works, we would have most certainly been far behind the project now found possible to take up.

Thanks are due to the staff of my department, particularly to Shri Keshav Mahanta who corrected the original typescript of the thesis.

The publishers will be happy if this work is received with the appreciation it deserves.

Gauhati University
31 May, 1966

Maheswar Neog,
Professor, in charge of Department of
Publication, Gauhati University

PREFACE

The neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement initiated by the saint-poet Śaṅkaradeva in the last decade of the fifteenth century is an epoch-making phenomenon in the religious and social life of medieval Assam. Its impact on religion, literature, fine arts and social life of Assam, particularly of the Brahmaputra Valley, is indeed great and abiding. The satra institution which is still functioning as a living organisation for propagating and diffusing Vaiṣṇavite ideals, was brought into existence by the Vaiṣṇavite saints headed by Śaṅkaradeva in the sixteenth century to serve as a centre of religious propagation and discussion. It expanded and developed during the course of the next two centuries, and a net-work of satras practically covered the entire Brahmaputra Valley and its adjacent areas. Although materials for a systematic and scientific study are available in abundance no attempt, until a decade back, was made to present a systematic and connected account of the growth and development of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement and the satra institution of Assam.

An attempt at presenting a comprehensive survey of the Vaiṣṇava movement and systematic study of the satra institution has been made here. The work was prepared for the Doctorate Degree of the Gauhati University and it was accepted for the same in 1955. The work was prepared and completed during 1952-54, but it could not be published so long for want of fund. It has now been possible after a lapse of twelve years to publish the work with the fund provided by the University Grants Commission. No material change has been made in the original matters of the work submitted to the University as a doctoral thesis.

In preparing this work all available source-materials of primary and secondary importance have been carefully examined before use. But in spite of my sincere efforts, error may have crept into the volume for which I owe an apology to the learned readers.

I take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to the late Dr. Birinchi Kumar Barua who took so much trouble in guiding my research work in the midst of his manifold activities. Dr. Barua is no more with us and it pains me to think that he could not see the work in printed form.

I express my gratitude to the University Grants Commission for providing the necessary fund at the disposal of the Gauhati University for publication of this work. I should also thank Dr. M. Neog, Professor, in-charge of the Publication Department, Gauhati University, for making necessary arrangement for its publication. I also thank Sri Keshav Mahanta of the Publication Department, Gauhati University, for rendering valuable help while preparing the press copy of the typescript.

Lastly, I thank Sri Kalicharan Pal, Proprietor of Nabajiban Press, Calcutta and his staff for kindly printing the work with utmost care and patience.

Gauhati University,
May, 1966.

S. N. Sarma

INTRODUCTION

I

The Vaiṣṇavite movement of Assam initiated by Śaṅkaradeva in the closing decades of the fifteenth century of the Christian era, is remarkable for its many sided contributions to the cultural history of the land. Within two hundred years since its inception it spread over the entire Brahmaputra valley and parts of modern Cooch-Behar which then formed a part of Kāmarūpa. With the disintegration of the Koch kingdom, its western part comprising modern Cooch-Behar gradually lost contact with the rest of Assam and subsequently became a part of Bengal. Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva who may be styled as *Trimūrti* of Assam Vaiṣṇavism, died in Cooch-Behar enjoying the patronage of the then reigning kings. The movement brought in its wake a literary and artistic renaissance in Assam.

The movement did not differ in essential points from similar Vaiṣṇava movements of medieval India. Characteristics, like belief in and adoration of a personal God Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, emphasis on devotion and faith, recognition of the equality of all persons, the ignoring of the caste distinction at the spiriual level, the high place assigned to virtues like love, piety and non-violence and deprecation of the practice of image-worship, are common to all Vaiṣṇavite sects of India. The movement may, therefore, be called a part of the All-India Vaiṣṇavite movement of the middle ages. This does not, however, mean that the Vaiṣṇava faith and movement of Assam was devoid of any speciality of its own. In practical application of the principles and tenets and in working out the details of the faith, it evolved a cult of its own best suited to the genius of the people.

The new cult thus moulded according to the local circumstances, was popularly known as the *Mahāpuruṣīyā-dharma.* The real name of the cult was Ekaśaraṇadharma or the religion of supreme surrender to one God, viz., Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa. The term *Mahāpuruṣīyā* is popularly believed to have been derived from the epithet Mahāpuruṣa, generally applied to mean Śaṅkaradeva. He was known to his followers as Mahāpuruṣa (the great being) and therefore the religion propagated by him came to be known as the *Mahāpuruṣīyā-dharma.* But another explanation of the designation *Mahāpuruṣīyā-dharma* may be suggested. The term Mahāpuruṣa is also an epithet of God Nārāyaṇa. In a few verses of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

(II/1/10, XI/5/33) it has been used in the above sense. Śukadeva, the expounder of the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa,* addressed Parīkṣita as a *Mahāpauruṣika,* i.e. a devotee of Mahāpuruṣa. As the Vaiṣṇava cult of Assam enjoins the worship of Nārāyaṇa only, the cult probably came to be known as the Mahāpurusīyā-dharma, i.e. the cult of Mahāpuruṣa. Whatever might be the origin of the use of the term Mahāpurusīyā-dharma, the popular belief that it was so named because it was propagated by Mahāpuruṣa, an honorific title of Śaṅkaradeva, led the followers of Dāmodaradeva and Harideva to style themselves as *Dāmodarīyā* and *Haridevī*, instead of introducing themselves as *Mahāpuruṣīyā*. At present, therefore, the term *Mahāpuruṣīyā* particularly includes the followers of the three sub-sects of Assam Vaiṣṇavism, viz. Nikā, Kāla and Puruṣa Saṁhatis. The members of these sub-sects trace the origin of their respective faith to Śaṅkaradeva, while the members of the two other sub-sects, viz., Dāmodarīyā and Haridevī, do not acknowledge Śaṅkaradeva as the originator of their respective orders.

The most notable characteristic of the Vaiṣṇavism of Assam is the satra institution through which the faith was propagated and stablised. It may be monastic as well as semi-monastic in form. The former type resembles, to a certain extent, the Buddhist monasteries of ancient times and the mathas of the medieval age. But the importance of the institution lies in the fact that it is intimately connected with the Assamese society and it has become a part and parcel of Assamese life. Contributions of this institution towards the spread of Vaiṣṇavism in particular and the cultural development of Assam in general, are indeed great. The high percentage of people professing Vaiṣṇavism in Assam is accountable to the activities of this institution during the last four centuries of the Christian era. It is because of the evangelical activities of this institution that many non-Aryan tribes today profess Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. The *District Gazetteers of* Assam, 1905, have recorded two hundred eighty-eight (288) satras, excluding many branches of those satras, spreading over the entire Brahmaputra valley. All of them are not uniform in size and affluence, but they are marked by the same fundamental characteristics.

The history of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam can not be treated without reference to the satra institution. In fact, the origin and development of the institution is intimately connected with the growth and development of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement in Assam. The religious activities of the Vaiṣṇavite householders are also conducted in accordance with the direction of satras. Therefore, the study of the satra institution covers the entire field of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism since its beginning in the sixteenth century.

II

The scope of this work is, therefore, limited to the study of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam with reference to the origin and development of the satra institution. The satra institution is the product of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement and the latter found its full expression through the former. Therefore, the history of the movement, its growth and later developments have been included within the scope of this work. The type of Vaiṣṇavism that existed before the advent of Śaṅkaradeva is beyond the scope of the work ; it has, however, been noticed in dealing with the background of the movement.

Vaiṣṇavism as practised in Assam is very little known abroad. No scientific and exhaustive treatment of the subject has been made by any scholar and therefore, modern works dealing with medieval Vaiṣṇavism have not taken proper notice of it. Melville Kennedy, in his *Caitanya Movement* (1925), has treated Vaiṣṇavism of Assam as an offshoot of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, although the two schools of Vaiṣṇavism are completely independent of each other. Even Śaṅkaradeva whose contribution is in no way less than any of the Vaiṣṇava saints of medieval India and who left such a profound and undying impression on the cultural history of Assam has not received adequate attention from scholars in medieval Vaiṣṇavism. Śrī Kṣitimohan Sen, in his *Medieval Mysticism of India,* has dismissed Śaṅkaradeva in one or two sentences probably owing to derth of materials available to him. Wilson's *Religious Sects of the Hindus,* Bhandarkar's *Vaiṣṇavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems* and Farquhar's *Outlines of the Religious Literatures of India* contain much information regarding the medieval sects of India, but unfortunately they contain nothing about Assam. The works that may be mentioned, though sketchy in character, are *The Life and Teachings of Śaṅkaradeva* (1922) and *Introducing Assam Vaiṣṇavism* (1946) by B. Kakaty and S. C. Goswami respectively. But these booklets naturally leave much room for fuller and scientific treatment of the subject. But so far as the detailed history of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement and its manifestation is concerned, no work written on scientific basis still exists. There are, however, a few works on the life and activities of Śaṅkaradeva written in Assamese which I have made use of wherever possible. This is in a way, the first systematic attempt to present as far as possible the important aspects of neo-Vaisnavism in Assam, its history and its institutional development.

The major portion of this work is based on materials collected from devotional works and biographies of medieval saints and chronicles of satras written within the period ranging from the sixteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century of the Christian era. Biographies of Vaiṣṇava saints and proselytisers who were also heads of different satras are an important source of information regarding the Vaiṣṇava movement and faith and throw much light on the satra system of Assam. Some of these are available in print and others still in the mauscript-form, are being preserved in the libraries of the Kāmrup Anusandhān Samiti and the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Gauhati. I have not only utilised materials from all the available sources but also contacted heads of several important satras regarding practices and observances. I have also utilised the reports received from many satras in response to a set of queries published in the Assamese daily *Natun Asamīyā* on 8th October, 1950. Official notes and reports of the Assam Government on religious sects and institutions have been taken into consideration in the preparation of this work.

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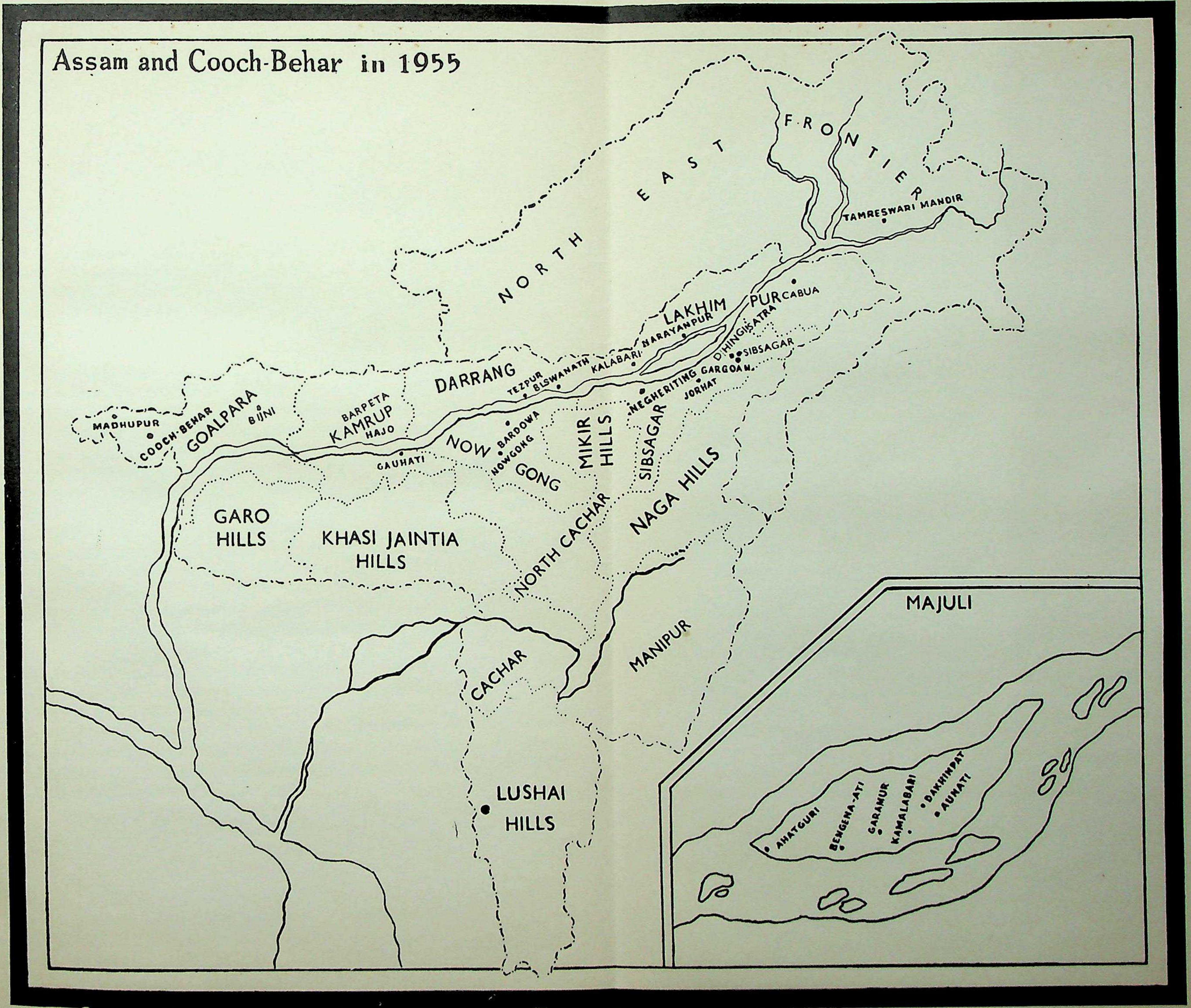

Assam and Cooch-Behar in 1955

NORTH EAST FRONTIER
TAMRESWARI MANDIR
LAKHIMPUR
CABUA
NARAYANPUR
KALABARI
BISWANATH
TEZPUR
DARRANG
DHINGISATRA
SIBSAGAR
GARGOAN
NEGHERITING
JORHAT
MADHUPUR
COOCH-BEHAR
GOALPARA
BIJNI
BARPETA
KAMRUP
HAJO
GAUHATI
NOW GONG
BARDOWA
NOWGONG
MIKIR HILLS
SIBSAGAR
NAGA HILLS
GARO HILLS
KHASI JAINTIA HILLS
NORTH CACHAR
MANIPUR
CACHAR
LUSHAI HILLS
MAJULI
AHATGURI
BENGENA-ATI
GARAMUR
KAMALABARI
DAKHINPAT
AUNATI

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF THE MOVEMENT

Introductory remark: The current of the religious history of Assam took a new turn towards the closing decades of the fifteenth century of the Christian era. It was caused by the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva. Within two hundred years of its inception the movement firmly established the Vaiṣṇava faith as the supreme religious order of the Brahmaputra valley. The movement also evolved a new institution known as satra which began to serve not only as the instrument of spreading the faith, but also helped to sustain and stabilise Vaiṣṇavism by making it a part and parcel of Assamese social life.

The Vaiṣṇava movement in Assam was not an isolated phenomenon having no connection whatsoever with the current of Vaiṣṇava revival that swept over the rest of India during this period. It was rather a local florescence of the great Vaiṣṇava renaissance started by Rāmānuja in the eleventh century on the basis of the older devotional cult of Alvārs of Tamil land. The movement gradually spread to other parts of India through the efforts of Nimbārka (11th century), Madhvācārya (13th century), Vallabhācārya (15th century), Rāmānanda (14th century), Kabīr (15th century), Chaitanya (15th—16th century) and others. The schools of Vaiṣṇavism founded by the above reformers might differ in philosophical niceties and outward religious observances, but the fundamental basis of these schools of Vaiṣṇavism did not differ very much. The impact of Islam gave a rude shock to the age-old Hinduism which impelled the thinkers and reformers of Hindu society to evolve a simpler and liberal faith that would be acceptable to all alike. The Bhakti cult so long confined mainly to South India was admirably suited to play the role of the much-needed religion of the time. It was accepted with certain modifications by reformers of different regions and within an appreciable length of time it over-flooded the whole of India.

Though remained politically aloof from the rest of India from early times till the occupation by the British, yet in no period of her history was Assam completely cut off from cultural trends and movements of India. The great Vaiṣṇava renaissant movement supplied necessary ideals and inspiration to the initiator of the movement who spent twelve years outside Assam, visiting holy places and studying religious trends of different parts of India. In order to get a proper perspective of the movement, we should be acquainted with the political and religious conditions of Assam in the fifteenth century which led Śaṅkaradeva to undertake the difficult and ardous task of a reformer.

Political condition: Since the beginning of the thirteenth century the ancient kingdom of Kāmarūpa was slowly undergoing a process of disintegration. The whole of Assam, from the eastern-most Dikkaravāsinī region to the river Karatoyā in the west, disintegrated into several kingdoms, some of which did not survive more than a few decades. From materials supplied by the Ahom chronicles and the medieval biographies of saints (*carita-puthis*) it appears that a line of Chutiyā kings (the Chutiya tribe is a branch of the Boḍo race) ruled in the easternmost tract of Assam at present known as Lakhimpur district. The Chautiyā kings were reigning at Śadiyā from the beginning of the thirteenth century till the subversion of their kingdom by the Ahoms in the early part of the sixteenth century. The Chutiyas worshipped various forms of Goddess Kālī with the aid of their tribal priests. The important form in which they worshipped this deity was that of *Kecāikhātī* (the eater of raw flesh) to whom human sacrifices were also offered.[1] To the west of the Chutiyā kingdom lay the Ahom principality which included the modern district of Sibsagar and parts of Lakhimpur district during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of the Christian era. The Ahoms were a Shan tribe; they used to worship their tribal gods viz. Comdeu, Phrā, Tārā, Ālong etc., till their conversion to Hinduism in the later part of the seventeenth century.[2] Further west, there was the Kachāri kingdom to the south of the river Brahmaputra and it probably extended atleast half-way across the modern Nowgong district. The Kachāris were a Tibeto-Burman tribe and they followed their own tribal customs and religion. The Kachāri kings of this period may have professed Hinduism, but there is no evidence to support that the bulk of the Kachāri population followed Hinduism. Sir Edward Gait is, therefore, of opinion that "at this time, the Kacharis were free from all Hindu influence". Towards the closing decades of the sixteenth century the Kachari kings formally accepted the Hindu Cult, and this is known from a silver coin issued in 1583 A.D. by Yaśonārāyaṇadeva from Maibong. The coin speaks of Yaśonārāyaṇadeva as "a worshipper of Hara-Gaurī, Śiva-Durga and of the line of Hācengsā[3]". On both sides of the Brahmaputra to the west of the Kachāri kingdom of the south and the Chutiya kingdom of the north-east, were a number of petty chiefs known Bhūyās. Each was independent of the other. They also did not practise a common religion. There were Brahmin Bhūyās as well as non-Brahmins, including Kāyasthas and Kalitās. But most of them as known from the medieval biographies were Śāktas. The western part of Assam comprising the modern districts of Kāmrup, Goalpārā and parts of Cooch-Behār was ruled by a few dynasties during the course of the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries and the kingdom was known as Kamatārājya. This Kamatā kingdom which emerged after the fall of the Pālas witnessed the rise and fall of several royal dynasties in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of the Christian era. This most important dynasty that ruled in the fifteenth century at Kamatā was the Khen; its last representative Nīlāmbara was overthrown by Hussain Shah in 1498. The rise and fall of several dynasties within a span of two centuries and frequent intrigues, murder and wrangling, deprived the kingdom of a stable government. By the end of the fifteenth century A.D. however, a new power, viz., the Kochas, under the leadership of Viśva Siṁha, came to be the dominant political power in Western Assam. The Kochas formed a branch of the Boḍo race. They had followed their tribal religion till they were finally absorbed in Hinduism in course of succeeding centuries.

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[1] E. Gait : *History of Assam,* (Second edition) p. 42.
[2] " " Ibid, p. 74f.
[3] " p. 250.

Religious condition: Constant friction and conflict for supremacy amongst the above powers were the order of the day and so the political condition of the country was unstable. The political instability helped to bring about a chaotic condition in the religious sphere also. The cementing force that binds together the heterogeneous elements in a society is, no doubt, the uniformity of religion and language. A strong and unified political power with a clear religious policy can, however, help towards achieving that uniformity. Assam, in the fifteenth century, presented a motely picture of diverse shades and grades of culture. The majority of the people belonged to non-Aryan tribes having distinct manners, customs and religious beliefs. Those who professed Hinduism loosely adhered to Vaiṣṇavism or Śaivism, Śaktism or Tāntricism.[4] To have an idea of these cults as practised in the period it may be convenient to discuss these religious cults a bit elaborately. In the following paragraphs a brief account is given.

Śaivism: The worship of Śiva was prevalent in Assam from ancient times. Śiva was the tutelary God of ancient kings of Kāmarūpa from the seventh to the twelfth centuries. The *Kālikā-purāṇa* and the *Yoginī-tantra* have mentioned several places sacred to God Śiva and there still exist many Śaiva temples in Darrang and Kāmrup districts, some of which have been in existence at least since the time of the composition of the *Kālikā-purāṇa.* The Śaiva temples at Hajo (Kedāreśvara and Kamaleśvara), Bisvanāth, Śiṅgari (Gopeśvara), Negheriting and Dobi (Parihareśvara) are famous from ancient times. Moreover, attached to every Devī temple we invariably find a temple dedicated to Śiva in the form of Bhairava. Śiva is worshipped in these temples in two forms, viz., Bhogī Śiva, and Yogī Śiva. The former in the form of Arddhanārīśvara is worshipped with offerings consisting of *sāmiṣa* victuals and the latter in the Yogin form is worshipped with offerings consisting of rice and vegetables, i.e. *nirāmiṣa* victuals. Bhogī Śiva is worshipped according to Tāntric rites, while Yogī Śiva is worshipped according to Paurāṇic rites. The first copper-plate inscription of Dharmapāla begins with an adoration to Arddhayuvatīśvara. According to the late K. L. Barua, the later kings of the Brahmapāla dynasty were votaries of Tāntricism. Arddhanārīśvara worship according to Tāntric rite was probably introduced by them. Dharmapāla himself in this inscription salutes Arddha-yuvatīśvara.[5] But the non-Aryan tribes, mainly the Kachāris, practised a form of primitive Śaivism where the worship was carried out by sacrifice of buffaloes, he-goats, pigeons, ducks and cocks and by the offering of rice and liquor. *Bāthau-Brāi* the god of the Boḍo-Kachāris can be equated to Śiva of the Hindus. He possesses the same characteristics as those of Śiva. We should here also remember that Śiva assumed the form of a *Kirāta* when he appeared before Arjuna. Naranārāyaṇa (1540—1584) the Koch king is stated to have legalised this form of tribal worship of Śiva by the issue of an edict which set apart the north bank of the Brahmaputra for the practice of aboriginal forms of worship.[6]

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[4] Conditions of Assam in ancient times have been discussed in *Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā* (1948) by B. Kakati, *Cultural History of Assam* (1950) by B. K. Barua; *Early History of Kāmrup* (1936) by K. L. Barua, *Kirāta-Jana-Kṛti* (1951) by S. K. Chatterji and in *The History and Civilisation of Assam* by Dr. P. Choudhury.

Śaktism: Śaktism was a dominant cult of Assam in ancient and medieval times up to the advent of neo-Vaiṣṇavism, and even today it holds a place next to Vaiṣṇavism. The *Kālikā-purāṇa* and the *Yaginī-tantra,* the two Sanskrit works composed in Assam, have mainly dealt with the Śakti cult. Śakti in her various forms was worshipped in different temples dedicated to her. But the radiating centres of Śaktism had been the shrines dedicated to Kāmākhyā and Dikkaravāsinī. The former is situated in Western Assam and the latter in the north-eastern-region. Dr. Kakati has identified Dikkravāsinī of *Kālikā-purāṇa* with goddess Tāmresvarī or Kecāikhātī (eater of raw flesh).[7] In these two shrines situated in the western and eastern parts of the country Śakti was worshipped according to Tantric rites and sacrifices. In the temple of Kecāikhātī human-sacrifices were performed, at least annually, if not daily or monthly. Human sacrifice was also performed in the Jayanteśvarī Temple of Jayantāpura located in modern Jayantīa hills. Besides these three main seats of Śakti cult, there were, according to *Kālikā-purāṇa* and *Yoginī-tantra,* many other shrines dedicated to Śakti in different parts of Assam. In some of these shrines terrible and gruesome tāntric practices were also observed.

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[5] K. L. Barua : *Early History of Kamarup,* p. 340 (Addendum).
[6] B. Kākati : *Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā,* pp. 21-24.
[7] " " : Ibid, pp. 35-70.

The worship of the snake-goddess Manasā, who is considered as a manifestation of Śakti in Assamese kāvyas, was very popular, specially in western parts of Assam. Goats, pigeons and ducks were killed to propitiate her. The *Padmā-purāṇa* and the *Beulā-Upākhyāna,* the two Assamese kāvyas composed by Mankar and Durgābara during the closing decades of the fifteenth century definitely prove the existence and popularity of this cult on the eve of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement.

Vaiṣṇavism : The third important sect of Hinduism that prevailed on the eve of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement was pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism. But this form of Vaiṣṇavism is quite different from the one introduced by Śaṅkaradeva and his followers. The worship of Viṣṇu in the form of Vāsudeva seems to have been prevalent from early times. The Baragaṅgā Rock inscription of Mahābhūti Varman (554 A.D.) which refers to the king as *Parama-Bhāgavata* is the earliest recorded evidence of the existence of Vaiṣṇavism. The *Kālikā-purāṇa* (C. 12th) mentions five manifestations of Vāsudeva with their pithas, of which Hayagrīva-Mādhava at Maṇikūṭa and Vāsudeva in the Dikkaravāsinī region, are most important[8]. King Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa who ruled at Sadhayāpuri (supposed to be modern Sadiya) in north-eastern Assam, records in his inscription, dated 1401 A.D. that he granted two hundred *putis* of land in the village Bakhanā to a Brahmin Ravideva, son of Harideva, who was a regular worshipper of Vāsudeva.[9] All these forms of Vāsudeva installed in the diffeernt shrines are still worshipped according to Pāñcarātra mode. That the Vāsudeva cult was a living cult on or before the fifteenth century is also proved by the personal names to be found in the land-grants of early Kāmarūpa kings and the genealogies of a few early Vaiṣṇava reformers. Thus the Nidhanpur grant of Bhāskara Varman alone contains personal names of Brahmins which are also the names *Vyuhas* and *Vibhavas* of the Pāñcarātra-Vaiṣṇavism.[10] Similarly the list of names of forefathers of Gopāla Ātā, a Vaiṣṇava proselytiser of the 16th century includes among others such names as

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[8] B. Kākati : Ibid, pp. 71-72.

[9] *The Journal of the Assam Research Socitty,* vol. III, No. 2, p. 42.

[10] B. K. Barua : *A Cultural History of Assam,* p. 150.

Vāsudeva, Pradyumna, Śankarṣaṇa and Aniruddha.[11] Another noteworthy evidence of the existence of the Vāsudeva cult in the pre-Śaṅkarite period of Assam is furnished by the prevalence of the worship of Vāsudeva in smārtta rites like *śrāddha,* and *Pārvaṇa.* Brahmins who thus worship Vāsudeva are known as *pracīna-panthī,* while those whose forefathers came to Assam later and adopted the modes of smārtta practices modified by Raghunandana (15th century) of Bengal are not required to worship Vāsudeva. Images of Vāsudeva and his manifestations found in different parts of Assam also point to the conclusion that Vāsudevaism was the earlier form of Vaiṣṇavism practised in Assam. Tāntric elements are also associated with Vaiṣṇavism of this type. "The doctrine of *mantra* and *yantra* in the Saṁhitās of Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism are indistinguishable from Śākta teachings. Magic in all its forms, with innumerable spells and rites and talismans is carefully described and eagerly commended."[12]

While the cult of Vāsudeva mainly flourished in the temples, the Vaiṣṇavism of the epics appeared to have influenced a certain section of the mass. The Assamese translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by Mādhava-Kandali, the court poet of the Kachāri king Mahāmānikya of the fourteenth century, and popular translations of several episodes of the *Mahābhārata* by Haribara Vipra, Kaviratna Sarasvatī and Rudra Kandali, all belonging to the fourteenth century A.D., establish that Vaiṣṇavism as found in the two epics was not unknown to a section of poeple.[13]

Predominance of Tāntricism: But the current of Vaiṣṇavism was thin, and the bulk of the Hindus allured by the attractions of the Śaiva and the Śākta cults associated with Tāntric practices, resorted to them. In stead of delving deep into the mysteries of Tantricism, people very naturally adopted the outward philosophy of sex and palate as the real criterion of their religion. "The land was infested with itinerant teachers of the Vāmācāra Tāntric schools with their insistence on the philosophy of sex and palate. Among religious rites, the most spectacular were bloody sacrifices to gods and goddesses amidst deafening noises of drums, cymbals, night-vigils, virgin worship and the lewd dances of temple women".[14]

Muslim historians of the medieval period have also recorded a few gruesome practices said to have been in vogue in Kāmarūpa. According to *Haft-Iqulim,* there was in Kāmarūpa a class of persons called Bhogīs who were voluntary victims of a goddess named *Āi* (mother) who dwelt in a cave. From the time when they announced that the goddess had called them they were treated as privileged persons. They were allowed to do whatever they liked and every woman was at their command. But when the annual festival came they were killed. Magic also held an important place in the estimation of the people and in *Ain-i-Akbari* they were accused, among other practices, of divination by the examination of a child cut out of the body of a pregnant woman who had under-gone her full term of months.[15] *Baharistan-I-Ghaibi* narrates how the people of Assam practised sorcery and magic to influence the course of judicial proceedings as well as of war.[16] Wide prevalence of sorcery and magical rites as late as the seventeenth century A.D. has been recorded by the authors of *Ālamgirnāmāh* and *Fathiyā*. Various rituals and observances of Tāntricism, so widely prevalent in the land, seems to have impressed the Muslim historians as something extraordinary and they regarded them only as practices in witchery and magic.[17]

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[11] B. Kākati : *Mother Goddess Kāmakhyā,* p. 75.

[12] R. G. Bhandarkar : *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Sects,* p. 56ff.

[13] B. Kākati (edited) : *Aspects of Early Assamese Literature* chapt. II, pp. 16ff.

[14] B. Kākati : *Mother Goddess Kāmākhya,* p. 84.

The medieval biographies also point to the same state of Tāntric influence on the people of the land. Thus *Gurulīlā,* a medieval biography of Dāmodaradeva has described the state of religious affairs in Assam on the eve of the Vaiṣṇavite revival in the following way.

"In Kāmarūpa, the land of Goddess Kāmākhyā, people of all castes used to conduct themselves according to their sweet will. There was no difference of religious conducts and observances amongst Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras. Unlike inhabitants of other countries (*deśas*), people of all castes here observed only the ceremony of cutting the umbilical chord and nothing else. They used to worship various village gods (*grāma-devatā*), but none worshipped Hari (Viṣṇu).[18]

A similar description of spiritual degeneration has also been noticed in the *Vaṁśīgopāladevar Caritra* by Rāmānanda Dvija. Vaṁśīgopāladeva during his proselytising activities in Eastern Assam received stiff opposition from a section of people called *Baudhas,* probably adherents of the debased tāntric Buddhism. They claimed themselves as devotees of twelve gurus (*bāra-guru*) and in practice made no discrimination as regards caste, creed and sex rules in their conducts of life.[19] The late K. L. Barua and Dr. B. K. Barua are of opinion that though Hiuen-Tsang did not notice any trace of Buddhism in Assam in the seventh century A.D.'

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[15] E. Gait : *History of Assam,* p. 58.

[16] M. I. Bora : *History of Assam as told by Muslim Historians* p. 49.

[17] S. Bhaṭṭācharyya : *Mughal North-East Frontier Policy,* p. 27.

[18] Rāmrāi Dvija : *Gurulīlā,* p. 6, verse 29-30.

[19] Ramānanda Dvija : *Vaṁśīgopāladevar Caritra,* pp. 27, 141f.

esoteric Buddhism in the form of Vajrayāna gradually began to gain ground secretely from the ninth century onwards, till it was practically obliterated by the surging waves of Vaiṣṇavism.[20] The *Baudhas* referred to by the Vaiṣṇavite biographers were probably those Vajrayānists. Thus we find that Tāntricism, both Hindu and Buddhist types, was widely prevalent and the worship of various gods and goddesses with elaborate ceremonies, both esoteric or exoteric, was also very popular. Monotheism and the cult of Bhakti did not thrive for want of a proper atmosphere, though the belief in one supreme God was not altogether alien to the learned section of the people. On the other hand, the bulk of the indigeneous tribal people followed their animistic tribal faiths. To bring all these people under systematised religions codes and conducts of life, to do away with the extreme tāntric observances connected with Śaivism and Śaktism which encouraged sensuality in the name of religion, and to supply the mass with a mode of worship which would be simple and at the same time accessible to all, were the pressing needs of the time. At this hour of need, Śaṅkaradeva came forward with his neo-Vaiṣṇavite creed and ideals. Aniruddha Kāyaṣtha, a Vaiṣṇavite writer of the seventeenth century, has appropriately described the coming of Śaṅkaradeva in his version of the Book V of the *Bhāgavata-purāna* in the following way :

"The Bhakti was previously absent (prior to Śaṅkaradeva) in this land of Kāmarūpa. By taking recourse to various acts of violence people degraded themselves spiritually. At long last, by the grace Kṛṣṇa, a person by the name of Śaṅkaradeva was born. He visited the holy place of Jagannātha at a comparatively tender age where he served the feet of the Lord for a long time. Here he came to know the doctrine of knowledge and devotion and at last returned to his native place after having received religious orders (*ājñā*). He made known the path of devotion (*Bhakti-patha*) to the people of his land so long steeped in misery.[21]" The cult was thus a conscious reaction against the dominant cult of Śakta-tāntricism, particularly its perversions and excesses. It is proved by the uncharitable references about the sexual practices and drinking habits of the followers of Tāntricism.

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[20] B. K. Barua : *A Cultural History of Assam,* p. 162f.

[21] H. N. Datta-Barua : *Bhāgavata,* Book V, vs. 4390-91.

CHAPTER II

SANKARADEVA AND MADHAVADEVA : THE MOVEMENT

Early life of Śaṅkaradeva: Śaṅkaradeva was born in the middle of the fifteenth century at Alipukhuri near Bardowā in the district of Nowgong, Assam. The earlier biographies of the saint have not mentioned the date of his birth. Datyāri Ṭhākur, one of the earliest reliable biographers has clearly mentioned the date of his death as 1568 A.D. (1490 Śakābda), but has not given the date of his birth. But the later biographies of the eighteenth century and onwards have recorded two dates, *viz,* 1449 A.D. (1371 Śaka) and 1463 A.D. (1385 Śaka). The tradition, as well as the majority of the biographers of the later period supports the former date. The modern opinion is also in favour of accepting 1449 A.D. as the year of Śaṅkaradeva's birth. One of his ancestors Caṇḍibara came to Assam in the 14th century from Gauḍa and his family down to Śaṅkaradeva professed Śaktism. His father's name was Kusumbara Bhūyā. He was the chief of the Bhūyās (*Śiromaṇi Bhūyā*) with considerable power and affluence. Śaṅkaradeva was thoroughly educated in Sanskrit learning and in due course settled down as a householder. Strong in build, extremely handsome, deeply learned and pursuasive in speech, he developed an attractive personality which few could withstand.

At the death of the first wife, the religious propensity of his character, so long dormant, found an opportunity to develop. Approximately at the age of thirty-five he went out on a long pilgrimage of twelve-year duration and visited almost all the sacred places of northern India. According to *Kathā-gurucarita* and a few others, he covered all the important holy places of India from Badarikāśrama to Rāmeśwara-Setubandha.[1] That during this sojourn he came in contact with many saints and scholars cannot be doubted, but the reference contained in some of the biographies that he initiated Rūpa, Sanātana and Vṛdānvana Das[2] during this period cannot be relied upon as their religious life began much later than 1495 which approximately marked the conclusion of his pilgrimage. Moreover, they are universally accepted as disciples of Caitanyadeva. Rāmānanda, one of the biographers of Śaṅkaradeva, says that Śaṅkaradeva also met Caitanya at Puri in course of this pilgrimage, but this appears to be an anachronism since Caitanya was a mere boy of six or seven years when Śaṅkaradeva visited Puri near about 1490 A.D. Śaṅkaradeva must have also seen and must have been deeply impressed by the nature and working of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movements carried on by the sects of Rāmānuja, Mādhvācharya, Nimbārka and Rāmānanda in different parts of the country. Śaṅkaradeva's reference to the popularity of Kavir's song in places like Banaras and Puri (Oreṣā) in his celebrated work *Kīrtana,*[3] and the affinities as shown by Dr. B. Kakati between Vaiṣṇavism of Assam preached by Śaṅkaradeva and that of the South, speak adequately of the influences imbibed during his pilgrimage.[4] The impression of his more than one-year stay at Puri seems to be most abiding. The holy Jagannātha-kṣetra was the seat of Vaiṣṇava inspiration in those days and Vaiṣṇavas from all parts of India assembled there. After his return from his pilgrimage he also composed that part of the *Kīrtana* known as *Oreṣā-varṇana* where the mythology about the origin of the shrine of Jagannātha has been described.

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[1] U. C. Lekhāru (edited): *Kathā-gurucarita,* p. 29-33.

[2] " " Ibid, p. 30; *Guru-guṇmālā,* p. 7f.

It is not unlikely that Śaṅkaradeva might have received spiritual illumination from some Vaiṣṇava saint at Puri. In the preliminary lines of some of his works he makes obeisance to his Guru, though the name of the Guru is no where mentioned.[5] The biographers are also curiously silent over this point. In view of Śaṅkaradeva's own insistence on the necessity of a Guru in his various writings, it seems somewhat strange that he was without a Guru. But one of his biographers *viz.* Rāmānanda Dvija represents Śaṅkaradeva as saying to one of his followers that after he had visited the temple of Jagannātha, he resolved not to bow down his head to any other deity having once bowed to the image of Jangannātha.[6] This may lead us to suppose that Puri was the scene of Śaṅkaradeva's illumination. Aniruddha Kāyastha, who translated the fifth canto of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* towards the later part of the seventeenth century, remarks that Śaṅkaradeva received *Jñāna-bhakti* and *ājñā* (orders) at Puri to propagate Vaiṣṇavism.[7] The biographers of

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[3] Śaṅkaradeva : *Kīrtana,* section III, p. 23.

[4] B. Kākati : *Mother Goddess, Kāmākhyā,* p. 95ff.

[5] Śaṅkaradeva : *Rukmiṇīharaṇa Kāvya,* Verse 2; *Uttarākāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa,* verse 5.

[6] Rāmānanda Dvija : *Guru-carita,* p. 192.

[7] H. N. Datta-Barua (edited) : *Bhāgavata,* Book V. The verse runs thus :

alpa vayasata Jagannātha kṣttre gailā l
bahu dina Harirase caraṇa sevilā ll
tathāte pāilanta Jñāna-bhakati viśeṣa l
ājñā pāyā pāce asilanta nija deśa ll
(Verse 4391)

Śaṅkaradeva have uniformly stated that he received a copy of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* from one Jagadīśa Miśra who came from Puri at the bidding of the lord of Jagannatha-kṣetra to recite the scripture before Śaṅkaradeva. Shorn of its supernatural garb the incident proves that Śaṅkaradeva had developed a close intimacy with some one at Puri who sent Jagadīśa Miśra with a copy of the *Bhāgavata* to recite and ultimately hand over it to the saint of Assam. On the whole, experiences and impressions of his long pilgrimate helped a great deal in widening his religious outlook and inspired him to undertake the task of re-orienting the religious set-up of the country. After a laspse of twelve years Śaṅkaradeva returned home fired with imagination and zeal for a reform.

Activities at Bardowa: Immediately after his return from pilgrimage Śaṅkaradeva set himself seriously to the task of propagating the new faith of Vaiṣṇavism. Though an innate religious tendency marked his character from his boyhood and though the *Hariśchandra-upākhyāna* a religious kavya based on an episoed from the *Mākaṇḍeya-purāṇa,* is said to have been composed before he set out for the pilgrimage, yet he did not seem to have contemplated seriously of propagating a new faith before his return from the pilgrimage. Returning from the pilgrimage he permanently transferred the office of the Śiromaṇi-Bhūyān to a son of one of his uncles with a view to devoting himself wholeheartedly to the service of religion. On his request, his brother Rāmarāya constructed a spacious *deva-gṛha* wherein regular prayers and religious discussions began to be held.[8] Jagatānanda alias Rāmarāya and Rāmarāma Sarmā, the son of his family priest, were the outstanding companions who helped Śaṅkaradeva with the available means at their command to create a proper religious atmosphere at the initial stage of the movement. The first step towards that was taken through the pantomimic dance known as *Cihnayātrā,* wherein were shown the scenes of seven *Vaikuṇṭhas* with a presiding Viṣṇu over each. The background of the show was supplied by a painted scenery and it was accompanied by appropriate dance and music. Except Rāmacaraṇa all other biographers are unanimous in holding that Śaṅkaradeva performed this show after his return from the pilgrimage at the request of his relatives and friends. The performance was a great success and all were amazed at the miraculous power of the initiator and director of the show.[9] They began to look upon Śaṅkaradeva with a sense of wonder and reverence. The relatives and neighbours were thus brought to his fold with one stroke of his genius.

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[8] Bhūṣana Dvija : *Śrī-Śaṅkaradeva,* p. 37.

[9] According to *Śaṅkara-carita* by Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur the *Cihna-Yatra* was performed before Śaṅkaradeva set out for the first pilgrimage, but *Kathā-gurucarita* and other biographies have stated it to be his post-pilgrimage performance. The latter version seems to be more plausible.

But the faith and the movement did not take a definite shape till the receipt of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* through Jagadīśa Miśra, who being directed, as the story goes, by Jagannātha in a dream to recite the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* before Śaṅkaradeva, came to Assam and recited the entire *Bhāgavata* from the beginning to the end. Jagadīśa did not return, but died after a few months of the completion of his exposition of the *Bhāgavata.* Śaṅkaradeva was hightly profited by this recitation and exposition and whatever doubt and suspicion he had about the new creed of Bhāgavatism, was set at rest. According to the biographers, he composed several songs based on the stories of the *Bhāgavata* before he was in possession of the original copy brought by Jagadīśa Miśra. From Jagadīśa Miśra, he came in possession of the original version of the *Bhāgavata* with Śrīdhara Svāmī's commentary.[10] The possession of a copy of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* with the commentary of Śrīdhara Svāmi not only helped him to give a clear and definite shape to the creed of Bhāgavatism which had perhaps remained somewhat vague before, but also made it possible for him to render the original texts into Assamese verses. Rāmānanda, the biogarpher says; "From that day (the day on which the *Bhāgavata* was first recited by Jagadīśa) the *Bhāgavata* came to gain currency and devotees began to listen to its exposition with unflinching faith".[11] Datyāri, one of the earliest biographers, speaks of this incident of listening to the exposition by Jagadīśa Miśra in the following way: "Śaṅkaradeva listened with rapt attention to the exposition by Jagadīśa Miśra and realised that the *Bhāgavata* was a scripture without parallel, the scripture that determined Kṛṣṇa as the only God, *Nāma* as the real dharma and *Aikāntika-śaraṇa* (single-minded devotion) and *Sat-sanga* (holy association) as the indispensable elements of the faith. He thus realised the sublimity and profundity of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa.*[12]

The new cult though mainly based on the teachings of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* is further reinforced by the teachings of the *Gītā* which enjoins complete surrender to God and by the thousand names of Viṣṇu narrated in the *Padma-purāṇa.* The surrender to one God is very rigourously enjoined. It has been said by Śaṅkaradeva himself that a Vaiṣṇava should not worship any other god but Viṣṇu, he should not enter into any temple other than that of Viṣṇu nor should he partake of the offering made to any other God.

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[10] Rāmānanda Dvija : *Guru-carita,* p. 156, verse No. 670. The verse runs this;

Jagadīśa nāme eka Brāhmaṇa āchilā,
Dīpikā sahite Bhāgavataka lekhilā

[11] Daityari Ṭhākur; *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita* p. 25. Rāmānanda Dvija : *Guru-carita,* p. 156, verse No. 677.

(1) *Vicāra kariyā pāce Bhāgavata grantha l*
karilanta prakāśa Śaṅkare bhakti-patha ll
(11) *sehi dinā hante Bhāgavata pracārilā l*
bhaktasave ekacitte śunite lāgilā ll

[12] Daityāri Ṭhākur : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita,* p. 25.

In Eastern Assam: But very soon Śaṅkaradeva's campaign received a temporary set-back from the clash between the Bhūyās and the Kachāris which compelled the former to quit central Assam. The Bhūyā families including that of Śaṅkaradeva crossed to the north of the Brahmaputra to avoid the oppression of the Kachāris and settled at a place called Gāṅgmukh or Gāṅmau, near present Viśvanāth, a place in the Darrang district. But here too, they could not live long in peace and security. Ere long, the inroads of Bhutanese and Koches compelled them to shift their residence to a place known as Dhuāhāṭā-Belaguri, where the Ahom monarch settled them with lands and estates. Having settled down, Śaṅkaradeva engaged himself in the task of propagation through the process of congregational chanting of prayers, songs, dramatic performances, and religious discussions. Attracted by his novel method of propagation and the simplicity of the cult and also by his personality, disciples began to swell in number with the passage of time. But it should not be supposed that his proselytising campaign was a smooth-sailing one. A conservative section of Brahmins, who maintained themselves by ritualistic practices, opposed the new cult of Vaiṣṇavism lest their profession should suffer. But Śaṅkaradeva tactfully met their challenge and covinced them of the genuineness and superiority of the faith professed by him. The important achievement of Śaṅkaradeva during his stay at Dhuāhāṭā-Belaguri was the acquisition of Mādhavadeva to his fold, who after his conversion proved himself the ablest and the most faithful disciple and ultimately succeeded him. His relation with Śaṅkaradeva was similar to that of Uddhava with Kṛṣṇa, and that is why the hagiographers describe Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva as incarnations of Nārāyaṇa and Ananta respectively.

Mādhavadeva was born near about the year 1490 A.D. in a Kāyastha family at a village called Nārāyaṇapura in the present district of Lakshimpur. His father Govindagiri *alias* Bakaṇāgiri originally had a family at Bāṇḍukā, somewhere in Cooch-Behar and subsequently he migrated to eastern Assam where he married for the second time in a Bhūyā family. Mādhava was born of this second marriage. Though his early childhood was spent in much hardship, he managed somehow to acquire proficiency in Sanskrit language and learning. Once he fell seriously ill and on recovering promised to offer a goat to Durgā on the occasion of her annual worship. He engaged his brother-in-law Rāmadasa *alias* Gayāpāṇi to procure a suitable goat for the purpose. But Rāmadāsa, who was a disciple of Śaṅkaradeva did not care so much to procure it and ultimately

Mādhavadeva annoyed with the brother-in-law's delaying tactics, one day demanded an explanation. Rāmadasa politely told him of the new faith of Śaṅkaradeva, which was against any form of violence to animals and worship of any god or goddess other than Viṣṇu. Mādhavadeva, a staunch believer in *pravṛtti-mārga* naturally did not relish the reply and therefore, he set out with his brother-in-law for a religious dispute with Śaṅkaradeva. After a prolonged dispute Śaṅkaradeva established the superiority of *nivṛtti-mārga* and Mādhava therefore, not only accepted the Vaiṣṇava faith but acknowledged Śaṅkaradeva as his Guru. This unique union gave a renewed momentum to the progress of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. Mādhava from the very day of initiation devoted himself heart and soul to the cause of his Guru and the faith. His ardent devotion, scholarship and missionary zeal, treading upon the opposition that stood on the way helped to widen the sphere of Vaiṣṇavism.

In the meantime an unhappy incident embittered the feeling of Śaṅkaradeva which ultimately prompted him and his faithful followers to migrate from the Ahom-kingdom to western Assam. Cuhuṅmuṅ-Dihingia Raja (1497—1539 A.D.), the reigning Ahom monarch, engaged the Bhūyās, of whom Hari Bhūyā, the son-in-law of Śaṅkaradeva, was one of the prominent members, in catching wild elephants. But owing to their negligence no wild elephant could be captured, and therefore, a few of the Bhūyās including Hari Bhūyā and Mādhavadeva were taken to custody. Hari Bhūyā with a few of his companions were ultimately put to death at the king's bidding, but Mādhavadeva was let off. This sad bereavement embittered Śaṅkaradeva's feeling against the Ahom monarch. The kingdom of the Koch-king Naranārāyaṇa who was known to be an enlightened monarch and had the reputation of sheltering and encouraging scholars, poets and saints, was considered a better resort by Śaṅkaradeva and other Bhūyās.[13] In the meantime an oppotrunity presented itself in the form of the Koch invasion under Cilārāy in 1546 during the reign of Sukleṅmuṅ (1539—1552). Śaṅkaradeva and his relatives, probably with the help of the Koch army, set out for Kāmarūpa within the kingdom of Naranārāyaṇa. With his relatives and faithful followers he temporarily settled at different places like Kapalābāri, Caparā, Cūṇporā and finally established himself permanently at Pāṭbāusi, near Barpeta.

In Kāmarūpa: The third phase of his career commenced with his entry into Kāmarūpa. At Cūṇporā, Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākur, better known as Ṭhākur Āṭā, one of the most important disciples, came into his fold. Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākur's original name was Bhavānanda and was a well-to-do merchant by profession. Influential and well-to-do, he was instrumental in bringing a large number of persons to the religious fold of his Guru Śaṅkaradeva. At Pāṭbāusi, the prayer hall and the shrine having been erected, regular religious discussion and recitation of the *Bhāgavata*, dramatic performances and congregational chanting of prayer were constantly held similar to those that had been held at Dhuāhāṭā-Belaguri. People began to come in large numbers into his fold attracted by his personality as well as by the mode of his preaching. Here, at Pātbāusi, Dāmodaradeva, Harideva and Ananta Kandali, three of the principal Brahmin associates of Śaṅkaradeva came for the first time under his influence. It is told in the biographies that he did not personally initiate the Brahmins but had them initiated by his family priest Rāmarāma Śarmā.[14] Any way, the recruitment of these Brahmins to his Faith helped him to enlist the sympathy and co-operation of the Brahmins who as a class had remained so long outside the sphere of his influence.

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[13] Rāmcaraṇa *Ṭhākur* : *Śāṅkara-carita*, p. 125.

Second Pilgrimage: Having permanently established himself at Pātbāusi, he set out for a second course of pilgrimage with more than one hundred followers near about 1550 A.D. The biographers are not unanimous in detailing the sequence of their visit to different places but they all maintain that having taken ablution in the Ganges they visited Gayā, Bānārās and finally Puri. On their way back they visited the *matha* of Kabir whom Śaṅkaradeva had held in high esteem. But to their utter disappointment Kabir was no longer alive to receive them but his grand-daughter reverentially greeted them. According to the *Kathā-gurucarita* Śaṅkaradeva met Caitanya, Harivyāsa, Rāmānanda and others in Puri, but this seems nothing but an anachronism, since Caitanya, Rāmānanda and Harivyāsa died earlier than 1550 A.D.

In Cooch-Behar : After his return from the pilgrimage Śaṅkaradeva again engaged himself in the task of propagation. In the mean time, a section of Brahmins complained to king Naranārāyaṇa that Śaṅkaradeva, a Śūdra, was preaching and practising a religion which he was not entitled to do, and that he was encouraging *mleccha* practices. The king sent for Śaṅkaradeva with a view to punishing him. Through the timely intervention of prince Śukladhvaja who married one of the nieces of Śaṅkaradeva, the latter was, however, rescued from being arrested and insulted. But two of his faithful followers *viz.* Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākur and Gokulcānd were taken to custody in the absence of their Guru and were put to inhuman torture to extract information from them. They were, however, let off afterwards when the officer-in-charge realised the futility of torturing them. In the meantime, having received an assurance from the king that no harm would be done to Śaṅkaradeva, Śukladhvaja who had so long kept Śaṅkaradeva away from the king, allowed the reformer to appear in person in the court. Accordingly, he appeared in the royal court where by his dignified mien, scholarly disposition, subtle arguments and poetic genius not only established the truth of his creed but created a strong impression upon the king. Thus highly impressed, the king ultimately sought initiation from the saint, but the latter avoided the task by putting off the ceremony to an indefinite time. He remained in Cooch-Behad for some time and then returned to Pātbāusi.

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[14] Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carita*, p. 244ff ; Rāmānanda : *Guru-carita*, p. 183.

During the last few years of his life he had to keep close contacts with the royal court which indirectly helped him to overcome oppositions. At the special request of the king he designed and directed the weaving of *Vṛndāvaniyā kāpor*, a cloth of sixty yards in length wherein the episodes of the Book X of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* were embroidered. He composed and staged *Rāmavijaya-nāṭ* at the special request of the king and his brother Śukladhvaja. Highly pleased, the king once more requested the saint-reformer to initiate him. The saint, knowing it well that it would not be possible for the king to follow the life of a Vaiṣṇava and that Vaiṣṇavism would rather degenerate if kings and nobles were allowed to enter into its fold, decided not to initiate him at all. But in stead of disobliging the king he deferred the date of initiation. In the meantime, a malignant boil appeared in his body, a blessing in disguise as it were, to relieve him of the king's obligation. He passed away before the appointed day of initiation in the year 1568 A.D. (1490 Śakābda).

Thus he lived for a hundred and nineteen years of a full and vigorous life. His activities were not confined to one single place. He moved from place to place transmitting his knowledge and faith wherever he settled. Mr. Gait, the celebrated historian of Assam, is of opinion that the birth-date (1449 A.D.) is possibly thirty or forty years too early.[15] But considering the robust health and the regulated and disciplined life of the saint and the almost unanimous opinion of the biographers, the span of his life of more than a hundred years is most probably correct. It is true that the earlier biographers have not mentioned the date of his birth but all of them agree on the point that the saint lived for more than a hundred years. The date of his death is beyond question as all the biographers are unanimous in this respect.[16]

His contribution: Śaṅkaradeva was and is still regarded by the orthodox section of Vaiṣṇavas of Assam as an incarnation of Viṣṇu.

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[15] E. Gait : *History of Assam*, p. 85.

[16] Daityāri : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita*, p. 419 ; U. Lekhāru (edited) : *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 224.

Considering the versatility of his genius and contribution he made to the fields of religion, literature, music and theatre, the tribute is not unjustified though it smacks of deification. Assam has been the meeting ground of different races and culture. Naturally, therefore, it was not an easy task for him to bring these people of heterogenous nature within the fold of one religion. Yet Śaṅkaradeva achieved what seemed to be almost impossible. He gave the people a simple religion based on monotheistic Bhakti cult in place of polytheism, Tantricism with bloody sacrifices and Animism of the tribals. He introduced a simple mode of worship consisting of prayers and hymns composed in the people's language. He laid the foundation of the satra institution which ultimately stabilised Vaiṣṇavism in Assam.

In the field of literature his contribution is indeed great. A new gospel required a new Bible. He therefore composed kāvyas, plays and devotional lyrics (*Bargītas*). Out of twelve Books of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* he rendered into Assamese verse no less than seven, of which *Daśama-skandha* is most famous. His *Kīrtana* based on stories of the *Bhāgavata* is beautiful in expression and passionate in depth of feeling. The *Rukminīharaṇa-kāvya* served as a model to later Vaiṣṇava writers in their treatment of classical themes. Other works viz. *Anādi-pātan, Nimi-Navasiddha-saṁvāda, Kurukṣetra,* and devotional compilations like *Bhakti-pradīpa* and *Bhakti-ratnākara* are familiar to every Assamese and command the highest respect from all. The *Bargītas* reveal Śaṅkaradeva as a scholar, a poet and a passionate devotee. He blended in these noble songs lofty thoughts with passionate lyrical feelings couched in rhythmic and ornate language. He is the inventor of a class of one-act plays known as *Aṅkiyā-nāṭ* and the technique of performance was introduced by himself. He composed six such *Aṅkiyā-nāṭs* in Brajabuli language. Lastly, he introduced many classical *rāgas* in his songs and set the standard of the mode of singing in accompaniment to different musical instruments.

To sum up his contributions—(1) He clearly and boldly established the unity of Godhead by propagating a strict monotheistic doctrine. (2) He successfully fought against the elaborate and costly rituals and replaced them by simple religious practices. (3) He brought to the fore-front the ideal of desireless devotion (*niskāma-bhakti*) in place of religious observances actuated by desires. (4), He recognised the equality of all castes at the spiritual level and boldly asserted that a devotee belonging to the lowest social stratum is superior to a Brahmin without faith and devotion. (5), He ushered in a period of literary revival and cultural renaissance. (6), He laid the foundation of the satra institution which subsequently ministered to the spiritual and cultural need of the people so much.

In the words of Dr. B. Kākati it may be said : "Śaṅkaradeva had given Assam a new life, letters and a state. Rulers have come and gone and their kingdom perished in the dust, but Śaṅkaradeva's state endures and broad in the general heart of men his power survives".[17]

Mādhavadeva: Of numerous followers of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva is decidedly the most famous. Śaṅkaradeva left behind two sons, Rāmānanda and Haricaraṇa. But like Nānak, who in stead of nominating any of his relatives to the Guruship named Aṅgad, Śaṅkaradeva too, in stead of nominating any of his Brahmin followers or one of his sons, nominated Mādhavadeva as the spiritual successor. The criterion of the nomination was neither high birth nor relationship but the spiritual accomplishment, scholarship, organising ability and personality of the nominee. Mādhavadeva who moved with Śaṅkaradeva like a shadow through thick and thin was intimately known to the Guru than any of his disciples. He proved his mettle and ability on many occasions and trying situations. It is narrated in the biographies of Śaṅkaradeva that when his son Rāmānanda approached his death-bed seeking spiritual instruction, the saint is said to have directed his son to approach Mādhavadeva on whom all his spiritual strength and energy devolved.[18]

Mādhavadeva outlived Śaṅkaradeva by twenty-eight years and during this period he carried on the proselytising activities as well as the cultural tradition initiated by his Guru. But in the very first year of his pontifical tenure, a section of Vaiṣṇavas headed by Dāmodaradeva seceded, disowning Mādhavadeva's leadership. Here is the beginning of schism. The main cause that led to this division was that Dāmodaradeva, being one of the principal followers, naturally expected to succeed Śaṅkaradeva to the pontifical position. But when his expectation was belied by the nomination of Mādhavadeva he found it difficult to regard Mādhavadeva, an erst-while colleague, as his superior. It is narrated in the biographies that Dāmodaradeva did certain modifications to accommodate *smārtta* rituals in the Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva and even accepted in his fold a few persons who were expelled from the order by Mādhavadeva. When Mādhavadeva called for an explanation, Dāmodara is said to have replied : "Though I have deviated a little from Śaṅkaradeva, I have not thereby deviated from the original preachings of the *Bhāgavata*. I consider the *Bhāgavata* to be more authoritative than Śaṅkaradeva. Further, I do not owe any explanation to you (Mādhavadeva) as I am not a member of your order".[19] Upon this unpleasant reply Mādhavadeva is said to have severed all connections with Dāmodaradeva.[20] It cannot be denied that Mādhavadeva's uncompromising attitude towards *smārtta* rituals alienated a section of Vaiṣṇavas, particularly the Brahmins, who could not altogether shake off a Brahminical bias for such rituals.

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[17] B. Kākati ; *Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā*, p. 87.

[18] Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carita*, p. 299 ; *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 228.

[19] Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carita*, p. 305f ; Daityāri : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavdeva-carita*, p. 299 ; *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 229.

[20] Rāmānanda Dvija : *Guru-carita*, p. 396,

Activities in Kāmarūpa,: Mādhavadeva remained for some time at Gaṇak-kuchi and later on moved to Sundarīdiyā close to present Barpetā, whence he conducted the affairs of the order. Himself a strict disciplinarian and a life-long celibate in the cause of religion, Mādhava did not allow any of his followers to relax the practices of *Ekaśaraṇa-dharma.* He constantly reminded his followers of the simplicity, unostensibility, concord and single-hearted devotion that were to be observed by a true Vaiṣṇava. Absence of any outward attraction, however, adversely affected the spread of his cult. A large section of people attracted by the liberal attitude of Dāmodaradeva and also by the outward show of festivals and performances observed in his satra, went over to his side.[21] Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākur, the friend and colleague of Mādhavadeva advised the latter to follow the method of Dāmodaradeva, otherwise their followers would dwindle gradually. Mādhavadeva reluctantly undertook the task of reorganising and reconstructing the Barpetā satra on a grand style. On the completion of the construction, the opening ceremony was performed with dramatic performances and religious dances, where devotees donning female custumes acted and danced as gopis. Mādhavadeva's opponents however, found it a convenient occasion to bring him under the frown of Raghudeva the then king of the eastern Koch kingdom. They alleged that Mādhavadeva, with celibate disciples, had been dancing and singing with women. Raghudeva employed an officer to arrest Mādhavadeva and also to ascertain the truth of the allegation. Accordingly he was was arrested but ultimately when the allegation was found to be a baseless one he was let off. But he was not allowed to stay at Barpetā and was directed to reside at Hājo, near the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava.[22]

After staying a few months at Hājo he made up his mind to leave Kāmarūpa for good. The hostile attitude of the king as well as of a section of Brahmins made the atmosphere of Kāmarūpa too uncongenial for him. He therefore, decided to follow the footsteps of his Guru by migrating to the western Koch kingdom ruled by Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa, son of Naranārāyaṇa. But he had the satisfaction of seeing his principal disciples whom he empowered to propagate the faith and to initiate disciples on his behalf, got themselves established as expert proselytisers at different places of the country. Of the twelve principal apostles (*Dharmācāryas*) appointed by him, two were disciples of Dāmodaradeva. They were Vaṁśīgopāladeva and Yadumaṇideva who propagated in the Ahom kingdom and about whom more will be said later on. The remaining ten *Dharmācāryas*, viz. Gopāla Ātā, Mathurādāsa Ātā, Barviṣṇu Ātā, Keśava Ātā, Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur, Harihara Ātā, Śrirāma Ātā, Śrihari Ātā Beheruā-Viṣṇu Ātā had already established themselves as expert propagators at various places of western and eastern Assam. The youngest of the *Dharmācāryas*, viz, Padma *alias* Badalā Ātā was invested with the status and power of a *Dharmācārya* in Cooch-Behar.

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[21] Rāmacaraṇa ; *Śaṅkara-carita,* p. 310 ; *Kathā-gurucaritā,* p. 348ff. Daityāri : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita,* p. 3.

[22] Daityāri : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita,* p. 285 ; Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carita,* p. 311ff.

Mādhavadeva in Cooch-Behar: Mādhavadeva set out for Cooch-Behar with a few of his personal attendants and settled at a place called Bhelā-duār. King Lakṣmināraāyaṇa reverentially received him. It is narrated by Daityāri Ṭhākur that Vīranārāyaṇa, the heir-apparent to the throne with his mother and other princesses, embraced Vaiṣṇavism from Mādhavadeva. But here also, Mādhavadeva had to face a formidable opposition from the party headed by Virocaṇa Kārjji, a high ranking officer of the king. The officer was an admirer of Mādhavadeva at the initial stage of his stay in Cooch-Behad, but later on turned hostile owing to the pressure put on him by the opponents of Mādhavadeva. Ultimately an allegation that Mādhavadeva sought to disrupt the social order by suppressing the established faiths, was brought against him in the royal court. Mādhavadeva came out triumphant in the dispute organised at the instance of the king to decide the issue. The king, highly satisfied with his replies, passed orders directing the subjects under him to embrace Vaiṣṇavism. As stated by Daityāri Ṭhākur, he is said to have remarked : "Let all my subjects from this day, follow the path shown by Mādhavadeva. I hava come to know the purity of the faith of Mādhavadeva and therefore, let all my subjects cast off their existing faiths and beliefs so long prevalent in my kingdom".[23] The history of Cooch-Behar corroborates this account of the medieval biographies of Assam.[24] The patronage extended by the king, no doubt, silenced all oppositions and helped a great deal in gaining new adherents to Vaiṣṇavism. Mādhavadeva stayed in Cooch-Behar for three years and having firmly established the new faith both in Kāmarūpa and Cooch-Behar he died in 1518 A.D.

His contribution: Mādhavadeva was the worthy successor of Śaṅkaradeva and his contribution to the cultural field of Assam is manifold. He successfully carried out the mission of his Guru without caring for personal comfort. He did not hesitate to risk anything in the cause of his faith. He intensified the movement and also extended its sphere by appointing twelve *Dhamācāryas* with powers to initiate disciples at various places of the country.

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[23] Daityāri : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita*, p. 401.
[24] Choudhuri, A. : *Koch Behārer Itihāsh*, p. 151.

Mādhavadeva systematised the daily prayer services to be conducted at satras and religious centres by fixing the number and order of their performance. The practice of conducting fourteen services (*caidhya-prasaṅga*) in satras has been in vogue since the time of Mādhavadeva. He organised and reconstructed the Barpetā satra which henceforth became not only a centre of great religious activities, but also served as a model institution to the Vaiṣṇavites. The satra was organised on a democratic basis vesting all authority in the assembly of devotees that resided within the campus of the satra. Mathurādāsa Ātā, one of his leading disciples, was installed as the leader of the assembly of devotees.

He discarded the practice of worshipping the image of a deity and replaced the image by a sacred scripture, usually placed on the holy altar.[25] The main shrine of the Barpetā satra does not contain even today any idol. The image of Viṣṇu known as *Kaliyā Ṭhākur*, installed later on, is being kept in a separate small house not far from the main shrine of the satra. For the use of his followers Mādhavadeva collected the scattered parts of Śaṅkaradeva's *Kīrtana* with the help of his cousin Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur and finally arranged its parts into one complete whole.

His contributions to the field of literature and music are in no less insignificant than those of his Guru. He composed several one-act plays depicting the childish pranks of Kṛṣṇa. These are marked by lightness of touch and humour of situation and character. He rendered into metrical Assamese canto I of the *Rāmāyaṇa, Bhaktiratnāvalī* by Viṣṇupurī Sanyāsī, *Nāma-mālikā* by Purusottama Gajapati, king of Orissa. His *Rājasūya Kāvya,* based on an episode of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa,* is dignified in style, poetical in description and devotional in treatment. His crowning literary work *Nāma-ghoṣā* consists of one thousand devotional verses for which it is also known as *Hājāri-ghoṣā*. The mystic, poet and scholar in Mādhavadeva found admirable expression through the verses of *Nāma-ghoṣā*. It is an anthology of ecclectic verses, the major portion being translations from Sanskrit ślokas culled from various Purāṇas. Its depth of meaning, its intensity of devotion and its lucidity of expression, make it a significant literary work. Lastly, Mādhavadeva's *Bargītas* (noble songs) tuned to classical *rāgas,* are also highly poetical. Most of these songs depict incidents of the early life of Kṛṣṇa and they can be favourably compared with those of Surdās, the saint-poet of Hindi literature.

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[25] Bejbarua, L. N. : *Śaṅkaradeva āru Mādhavadeva,* p. 227.

Mādhavadeva's successor: Mādhavadeva did not nominate anybody as his successor. Just on the eve of his death when he was asked by followers to name some one of his disciples as his successor, Mādhavadeva is said to have replied : "I have pondered over the matter for three days but have not found anybody worthy of shouldering the pontifical burden. I, therefore, recommend my *Ghoṣā* for you where everything that may be necessary for you has been said. I have employed all my intelligence and energy in composing it. Devotees will find me there if they know how to seek."[26] This incident of Mādhavadeva refusing to nominate anybody after him, resembles the action of the Lord Buddha and the tenth Sikh Guru Govind Sing, who when asked to nominate their successors similarly replied by referring to their message and scriptures[27]. The above decision of Mādhavadeva, however, paved the way for internal dissension amongst his followers which ultimately resulted in the creation of three sub-sects, besides the sub-sects of Dāmodaradeva and Harideva.

Causes of the spread of the Movement: By the time of Mādhavadeva's death Vaiṣṇavism secured a firm foothold in the Brahmaputra valley. The rapid development and the popularity of the new cult may be attributed to the following causes :

(1) The simplicity of the cult is one of the main contributory factors of its popularity. Instead of elaborate and costly rituals, it prescribed a simple form of worship by means of congregational and idividual chanting of prayers and recitations.

(II) The character and personality of the initiators of the movement and their ideal conduct, gave additional strength to the growth of the movement. The commanding personality, the strength of character, the spiritual and scholarly attainments and the literary and musical accomplishments of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva easily attracted people to their side. They were looked upon by the people with a sense of reverence and awe and most of their followers regarded them as incarnations of God. Their principal followers were also men of learning, ability and charming personality and therefore, could attract people of all shades to their fold.

(III) The patronage extended by king Naranārāyaṇa and his son Laksminārāyaṇa helped a great deal in furthering the cause of the faith. In subsequent periods, the Assam school of Vaiṣṇavism received considerable help from the Ahom monarchs in the form of land-grants, though persecution was no less infrequent.

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[26] Daityāri : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita,* p. 381f ; and *Kathā-gurucarita,* p. 591.

[27] N. Datta : *Early Monastic Buddhism,* vol. 1, p. 315 ; and I. Banerji : *Evolution of Khalsa,* vol. I, p. 133.

(IV) Literary compositions, dramatic performances (*Bhāonā*) and songs played a great part in attracting people. The medieval biographies contain innumerable instances where people attracted and fascinated by melodious songs and verses, were seen to lend their sympathy to the new faith. A few instances may be noted here by way of illustration. The pantomimic performance *Cihna-yātrā*, performed at the initial stage of the movement by Śaṅkaradevi at Bardowā, created a sensation amongst the people and many of the erst-while opponents of Śaṅkaradeva became his followers.[28] Similarly, the dramatic performance enacted on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the newly constructed Barpetā satra during the time of Mādhavadeva, attracted thousands of people. They returned home with a sense of satisfaction and many of them embraced Vaiṣṇavism.[29] Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākur, who was instrumental in bringing several persons to the new faith of his Guru, himself had come previously under the spell of Śaṅkardeva being fascinated by a melodious song composed by the saint-poet and sung by a few travellers.[30] Prince Sukladhvaja, the famous general of Naranārāyaṇa, became a great admirer of Śaṅkaradeva ever since he heard a *Bargīta* composed by the saint. Lucid and poetical Assamese verses rendered from Sanskrit by the Vaiṣṇavite poets of this period, not only created a class of sympathetic listeners and readers, but also made it easier to transmit Vaiṣṇavite messages and principles to the public at large.

(V) Modes of preaching and propagation adopted by the reformers contributed a great deal towards the success of the new religion. Religious discussions illustrated with suitable stories or parables, religious disputes with opposite parties on various occasions, adoption of the spoken dialect as the medium of instruction, emphasis laid on ethical and theological aspects rather than on abstract philosophy and lastly, the ideal that "example is better than precept," set by the saints, helped to popularise the cult. The *carita-puthis* have described in details the day-to-day activities of the reformers and have given vivid descriptions of the above methods of preaching.

(VI) But the most important factor of the spread of the new faith was the establishment of an institution known as satra. The nucleus of this institution was begun by Śaṅkaradeva himself. The satra institution with its projecting branch *nāmaghar* in every village carried the torch of Vaiṣṇavism to every household in Assam within two hundred years of the advent of Śaṅkaradeva. But the satra institution did not attain its full-fledged form during the times of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. The history of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism after Mādhavadeva can be more appropriately called satra-Vaiṣṇavism.

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[28] Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carita*, pp. 114-119 ; and *Kathā-gurucarita* p. 36.

[29] Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carita*, p. 311 ; Daityari : *Śāṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita*, p. 304.

[30] Bhūṣana Dvija : *Śrī-Śaṅkaradeva*, p. 81f ; Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carit*, p. 190 ; Rāmānanda : *Guru-carita*, p. 176.

But even before the satra institution came into the picture and played its part, Vaiṣṇavism made a firm foothold in the country, specially in the western part, owing to causes mentioned above.

CHAPTER III

FUNDAMENTAL TEACHINGS OF THE SECT

Preliminary observation: Śaṅkaradeva was not primarily a speculative thinker. His ideal was not to propound a religion supported by discursive reasoning and abstract thinking, but to propagate a simple system based on devotion and faith. He was a reformer and a poet, but not a philosopher. Moreover, he could clearly and rightly perceive that the society was more in need of a reformation than a system of philosophy. That is why he diverted his attention solely towards the propagation of the new faith without caring whether the religion propagated by him was based on a systematic philosophy or not. Vaiṣṇava reformers of other parts of India from Rāmānuja down to Vallabhācārya tried to develop systems of philosophy as the basis of their cults by interpretating the *Vedānta-sūtra* and the *Gītā* and other scriptures of importance in their own lines. Thus we have *Visistādvaita, Dvaita, Dvaitādvaita, Śuddhādvaita* and *Acintya-bhedābheda* systems of Rāmānuja, Madhva, Nimbārka, Vallabhācārya and Caitanya respectively. It is true that Caitanya also did not give a philosophical grounding to his faith, but the Goswāmis of Vṛndāvana fulfilled this need. But in Assam neither Śaṅkaradeva nor his followers have tried to give this much-needed philosophical basis to their cult.

The absence of a systematic philosophy can be ascribed primarily to two reasons. (i) To Śaṅkaradeva and his immediate followers, Bhakti appeared to be of vital importance, and metaphysical questions were of little significance. The religion they propagated was mainly intended for the general mass and therefore, they did not care so much to formulate a philosophical system underlying their Vaiṣṇvite teachings. (ii) The followers of Śaṅkaradeva could have supplied the philosophical basis to the cult, but unfortunately there was none amongst his later followers who had the necessary philosophical acumen and profundity of scholarship. His own colleagues *cum* followers were too busy in stabilizing and propagating the faith against heavy odds. It is generally seen that a new faith gets a philosophical grounding only at a later stage of its history when it is firmly established in a country. But in Assam, Vaiṣṇavas of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were pure and simple devotees and their scholarship did not go beyond the study of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and similar Vaiṣṇavite scriptures.

Though the sect is devoid of a distinct and a well-formulated philosophical system based on the interpretation of the sacred texts, yet theological questions have not been altogether left out of discussion. Devotional works or digests like *Bhakti-ratnākara, Bhakti-viveka, Bhakti-ratnāvali* and *Nāmaghosā* have dealt with theological questions (though not systematically) from which we can have a considerable idea of the theological and ethical principles of the sect. But the relation between God and the soul, the nature of the phenomenal world and the like questions have not been systematically answered. Almost all the works of Śaṅkaradeva and his followers are translations and conpilations. No original theological work, or commentary on any fundamental scripture, was written by them. Therefore, it is not possible to get a clear philosophical view of the sect. Nevertheless, a rough idea of their philosophcal views can be had from the numerous translations and compilations left by them.

Assam Vaiṣṇavism mainly derived its devotional theologism from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and the *Gītā*. It is true that a theoretical homage is paid to the Vedas, but the authorities cited by the reformers are invariably the *Vaiṣṇava-purāṇas* and more particularly the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. Non-Vaiṣṇava texts have been rejected as *tāmasika* and untruthful and even among the Vaiṣṇava texts the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* alone is regarded as the essence of all *śāstras* and possessing the supreme authority. Almost in every devotional work a few lines in praise of the *Bhāgavata* (*Bhāgavata-praśaṁsā*) are found. Most of the works on Bhakti written with a view to formulating the Vaiṣṇva dogmatics are compilations from Purāṇas and Tantras, and the *Bhagavata-purāṇa* has supplied three-fourths of those materials. Therefore, the influence of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* in forming the theological background of Assam Vaiṣṇavism is quite clear and the monistic commentary of Śrīdhara Svāmī is highly popular amongst all sections of Vaiṣṇavas. Besides several minor works of lesser importance these works of devotional theology may specially be mentioned : (I) *Bhakti-ratnākara and* (II) *Bhakti-pradīpa* by Śaṅkaradeva, (III) *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* in Assamese translation by Mādhavadeva, (IV) *Nāmaghosā* by Mādhavadeva, (V) *Bhakti-viveka* by Bhaṭṭadeva and (VI) *Ghoṣā-ratna* by Gopala Misra. All these works based mainly on the *Bhāgavata* were written in the sixteenth and the early part of the seventeenth centuries. Vaiṣṇava theological and ethical dogmatics are also to be found in other branches of Vaiṣṇavite literature. The usual topics dealt in these works are mainly these : (i) superiorty of Bhakti over all other forms of worship, (ii) types and elements of Bhakti, (iii) nature of God, (iv) merits of adoring and worshipping Kṛṣṇa as the one and only God, (v) necessity of initiation, (vi) indispensability of Guru and the holy association and the like topics directly or indirectly connected with Bhakti. The theological, religious and ethical views and teachings set forth in the succeeding pages are deduced mainly from these works on devotional theologism, supplemented wherever possible by other important works of the Vaiṣṇava saints of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

(A) *PHILOSOPHICAL*

God : The conception and nature of God as found in the Vaiṣṇavite scriptures are derived from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* with Śrīdhara Svāmī's commentary. In the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* God is described as immanent and transcendental and having both *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* aspects. Assamese Vaiṣṇava scriptures without denying the *nirguṇa,* i.e. indeterminate aspect of God, have laid more stress on the *saguṇa* aspect. For the purpose of devotion the personal aspect has been specially extolled. The adorable God is not only personal but He is immanent as well as transcendental. Śaṅkaradeva in his celebrated work *Kīrtana* describes the twofold aspect of God and there he says that as characterless or indeterminate God is not comprehensible, devotees including the gods (devas) worship and adore His beatific form in the person of Nārāyaṇa[1]. Mādhavadeva in his *Rājasūya-kāvya* similarly describes God in the *nirguṇa* aspect, *as* devoid of adjuncts (*upādhirahita*) and of the nature of effulgence (*jyotirūpa*) but recommends Kṛṣṇa for the purpose of devotion.[2] Gopala Miśra, a junior contemporary of Mādhavadeva, speaks of God in his *Ghoṣā-ratna* as having double characteristics, viz., *svarūpa lakṣaṇa* and *taṭastha lakṣaṇa.* By His *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa* or essential characteristic, He is of the nature of pure consciousness and devoid of any duality. By His *taṭastha lakṣaṇa* or accidental characteristic, God is known as the wielder of the Maya-power with which He creates the world.[3] Taking a similar view Śaṅkaradeva states in *Nimi-Navasiddha-saṃvāda* that the original unmanifested and undifferentiated reality is Brahman and when Brahman for the purpose of creation manifests, He is known as Nārāyaṇa or Vāsudeva.[4] In Assamese Vaiṣṇavite works the terms, viz., Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva have been used as synonyms without making any subtle distinction. Even the Chapters of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa,* where the Pāñcarātra theology is discussed, have been omitted by Assamese translators because the *Yyuha* doctrine finds no place in the theology of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism. Nārāyaṇa or Brahman personified, is considered as the object of adoration. The first two lines of *Kīrtana* by Śaṅkaradeva have struck this note :

"At the very outset, I bow down to the eternal Brahman who in the form of Nārāyaṇa is the root of all incarnations[5]."

In fact, all the devotional works of the Vaiṣṇavism of Assam have clearly recognised the personal aspect of God and have accordingly enjoined His worship. Sometimes, owing to their over-zealous devotion for the personal God, a few Vaiṣṇava saints have altogether denied the impersonal aspect of God without considering the fact that such an assertion would go against their own statements expressed in some other places of their composition. Bhaṭṭadeva, one of the foremost Vaiṣṇava saints and a reputed proselytiser of the sixteenth century, refutes in his *Bhakti-viveka* the arguments of those who assert God to be an impersonal one, by profusely quoting from scriptures. He describes God as the embodiment of consciousness, bliss and existence (*sacchidānandavigraha ; ānandacinmayasamujjvala vigraha*) and says that God cannot but be personal, for the Vedas have been universally accepted as products of His breath. We cannot conceive of a thing having breath as impersonal.[6] Even Śaṅkaradeva's writings are not free from such contradiction. We have already referred to a passage of *Kīrtana* where Śaṅkaradeva speaks of God as having both *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* aspects. In *Anādi-pātan* he again says : "Because of confusion created by various scriptures, people cannot grasp the knowledge (*tattva*) of God and therefore those bewildered creatures think of God as the impersonal one."[7]

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[1] Śaṅkaradeva : *Kīrtana* (oreṣāvarṇana), vv. 84-85.

[2] Mādhavadeva : *Rājasūya Kāvya,* p. 4.

[3] Gopala Miśra : *Ghoṣā-ratna,* p. 9ff.

[4] Śaṅkaradeva : *Nimi-Navasiddha-saṃvāda,* verses 187-188.

[5] Śaṅkaradeva : *Kīrtana,* v. 1.

The adorable God being *saguṇa* and *sākāra*, the familiar epithets of the impersonal Brahman like *nirākāra* (formless), *nirañjana* (unattached, pure), *nirguṇa* (attributeless) etc. have been generally interpreted in conformity with the devotional cult. Thus, according to the *Nāmaghoṣā*, the term *nirākāra* applied to the personal God means one who is devoid of ordinary or spacial form (*Prākṛta ākāra-varjjita*) and not absolutely characterless or impersonal one. Similarly *nirguṇa* as an epithet of Nārāyaṇa means that He is above the influence of the three *guṇas*.[8] It may be said, therefore, that the Vaiṣṇavas of Assam without denying the transcendental and indeterminate aspect of God have recognised, for the purpose of devotion, a personal God to whom the negative epithets of the indeterminate Brahman have also been applied with modified interpretation.

Nature of God : The Supreme Being, viz., Nārāyaṇa possesses the the three familiar attributes *sat, cit* and *ānanda*. He is pure bliss, self-differentiated and the ground of all life. He is infinite in nature and attributes. He is omniscient, omnipotent, creator, destroyer and sustainer of all. In the *Haramohana* episode of *Kīrtana*, Śaṅkaradeva writes : "God Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme Soul and is the one and the only Lord of the universe. Nothing exists without Him. He is the cause (*kāraṇa*) as well as the effect of the creation (*kārya*). Just as ornaments made of gold do not differ in substance from gold itself, similarly, there is no distinction between God as the cause and God as the effect[9]; God is all-pervasive. In the Assamese version of Book X of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* Śaṅkaradeva speaks of the all-pervasive and transcendental nature of God. "Just as water, air, earth and sky are pervading the world, in the like manner God is pervading mind, intellect and vital breath (*prāṇa*) of things and beings. He is pure, qualityless (*guṇahīna*) and conscious self. In Him the world exists and yet He is beyond the world."[10] In another place of the same work it is stated that God with His incomprehensible power (*acintya prabhāva*) exists in the world and the world also exists in Him. The one supreme soul is pervading all things and beings like fire that remains invisible in all woods.[11]

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[6] Bhaṭṭadeva : *Bhakti-viveka*, chapt. XV, p. 202f.
[7] Śaṅkaradeva : *Anādi-pātan*, verse 157, p. 35.
[8] Mādhavadeva : *Nāmaghoṣā*, verses 162-163, p. 41.

God has been further described in a considerable number of verses as the only reality underlying various objects and beings of the world. He is immutable (*avikārī*), being above the influence of *Kāla* (time) and *Māyā* (illusion). The following extracts from *Bhakti-ratnākara* would testify to this idea of the Vaiṣṇavas.

"He (God) is the only reality and everything else that appears is illusory. There is no reality save and except Him."[12]

"He is the beginning, middle and the end of the world. There is nothing real except Him. Just as an earthen pot is nothing but the composition of soil and when broken, is reduced to soil again and just as before the composition of the pot the atoms of soil that constituted it were there, in the like manner God remains at all stages of the creation."[13]

"O Lord, You are the only unchangeable reality of this world ; others are liable to change and decay. Being the primal cause (*ādya kāraṇa*) of the creation you are above the changes caused by birth and death. O Nārāyaṇa, You, being the Primal and eternal Puruṣa, are free from change and decay and therefore, no limitation of any sort is applicable to you. Space, time and matter cannot measure or differentiate You. You are complete in Yourself."[14]

The Supreme Reality or God is called by various names, viz., Brahman, Paramātman, and Bhagavat. Jīva Gosvāmī, the well-known exponent of the Bengal school of Vaiṣṇavism, works out a subtle and elaborate distinction between Brahman, Paramātman and Bhagavat and comes to the consion that Bhagavat represents the most perfect form of God. Assamese Vaiṣṇavas have not tried to show any discrimination or difference in degrees of perfection between the above three conceptions of God. In *Nimi-Nava-siddha-saṁvāda* (a metrical work based on Book XI of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*) Śaṅkaradeva has interpreted the above terms and has finally shown that those are but different names of the Supreme Reality seen through different aspects. He writes in the following way to show apparent differences.

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[9] Śaṅkaradeva : *Kīrtana*, section VIII, p. 129.

[10] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata* (*Dasama-skandha*), verses 13030-32, p. 1041.

[11] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, verses 12219-12220, p. 966.

*[12] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnakara*, verse 111, p. 19.

[13] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, verses 130-132, p. 33.

[14] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, verses 134-137, p. 33f.

* The Sixteenth century Assamese version of *Bhakti-ratnakara* by Ramcaran Thakur has been quoted and referred to in this work.

"God as the director and controlled of senses is known as Paramātman, and as the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world, He is Bhagavat. When God appears to yogins in their meditation after the disappearance of ignorance, He is called Brahman. Brahman, Paramātman and Bhagavat are the names of the one Reality. The same Reality is called by different names owing to different characteristics seen from different angles (*ekerese tini nāma laksaṇa bhedata*)."[15]

The personified Supreme Reality, according to Vaiṣṇavite writings, is Nārāyaṇa. In *Nimi-Nava-siddhasaṁvāda,* Śaṅkaradeva describes at length the nature and characteristics of the adorable God Nārāyaṇa through the discourse of king Nimi and nine siddhas. Pippalāyana one of the siddhas, explains in the following way the characteristic features of Nārāyaṇa : "Nārāyaṇa is the ultimate cause of creation and dissolution ; there is no other God superior to Him. He remains a *sākṣī* in all the activities of the world, in deep sleep as well as in the state of dreaming and awakening. It is He who infuses life and vitality to all beings and causes jīvas to suffer and enjoy the fruits of their activities. Hari, Hara and Brahmā carry out His orders and therefore, He is the God of all gods. When He directs and controls the senses, He is known as Paramātman ; when He appears to yogins in their meditation He is known as Brahman, and when He is looked upon as the creator, sustainer and preserver of this world, He goes by the name of Bhagavat. These, viz., Brahman, Paramātman and Bhagavat are but names of the same Supreme Nārāyaṇa. He is not comprehensible to the mind, senses and intellect. Just as sparks separated from fire cannot illuminate its source, similarly mind and other senses, though originated from God, do not know Him owing to the over-powering influence of ignorance (*māyā*). Even the Vedas, unable to grasp fully the real nature of God, have tried to indicate His nature by a negative method. Without Whose aid nothing could be achieved and the knowledge of Whom marks the culmination of all activities and spiritual urge, know Him to be Nārāyaṇa."[16]

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[15] Śaṅkaradeva : *Nimi-Navasiddha-saṁvāda,* verses 178-181, p. 40f.

[16] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, verses 178-183, pp. 40-42.

This description of Nārāyaṇa incorporates both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* aspects of God and therefore, it cannot be called a clear-cut definition or description. But its leaning towards the *saguṇa* aspect is more pronounced. In other places of Śaṅkaradeva's writings as well as of his followers, Nārāyaṇa has been fully personified by being assigned bodily form and local habitation, though that form and habitation have been described as beyond the sphere of time and space.

In addition to these attributes Nārāyaṇa has been spoken of in innumerable passages as a loving, as well as a lovable God. He is described to be in possession of all auspicious attributes which attract devotees towards Him. Not only does He possess metaphysical qualities like nonduality, omnipotence, omniscience, etc. but such moral virtues as mercy, love and compassion. In order to favour His devotee and redeem them, He comes down in the form of various incarnations. *Karuṇāmaya* (compassionate), *Dīnabandhu* (friend of the lowly), *Bhakta-vatsala* (beloved of devotees), *Patit-pāvana* (redeemer of sinners) and many others are His attributes by which He is designated. Mādhavadeva in one of his verses of *Nāmaghoṣā* writes : "Forsaking the celestial Vaikuṇṭha and hearts of yogins, God comes down to that place where ardent devotees sing His auspicious names."[17]

Vāsudeva, Viṣṇu, Keśava, Mādhava, Janārddana, Govinda, etc. are some of the names that are used as synonyms of Nārāyaṇa. Some of these names are found in the list of deities affiliated to the *Vyuha* and the *Vibhava* of the Pāñcarātra cult. But in the theology of the neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Assam the *Vyuhas* and *Vibhabas* have no place and therefore, the names are simply used as synonyms of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. The use of the term Viṣṇu seems to be sometimes confusing. Viṣṇu has been mostly identified with Nārāyaṇa, but in some places he has been alloted a subordinate position to Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme personal God. When Viṣṇu is concieved as one of the three *guṇāvatāras,* i.e., as the preserver of the creation having the same status with Brahmā and Hara, He is considered a lower divinity than Nārāyaṇa. The following passage from *Nimi-Navasiddha-saṁvāda* clearly brings out the distinction : "Know Him to be Nārāyaṇa or Mahā-Hari whose orders are carried out by Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Hara and Who is the master of all gods. Liberation can be attained by worshipping His feet alone."[18] The same distinction between Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa has been made by Śaṅkaradeva in *Anādi-pātan*. This distinction has been inherited from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* wherin Nārāyaṇa is spoken as the source of all incarnations including Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva.[19] But ordinarily Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa have been indiscriminately used to mean the Supreme God.

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[17] Mādhavadeva : *Nāmaghoṣā,* verse 7, p. 2.

[18] Śaṅkaradeva : *Nimi-Navasiddha-saṁvāda,* verse 178, p. 40.

[19] Śaṅkaradeva : *Anādi-pātan,* verses 163-167, p. 38f.

Of all the manifestations (*avatāras*) of Nārayaṇa, Kṛṣṇa is regarded as the most perfect one. Kṛṣṇa as the adorable deity of the cult, is not considered a partial manifestation but the Supreme Being Himself. In support of this belief Vaiṣṇavas of Assam cite the verse 1/3/28 of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* where Kṛṣṇa is described as Bhagavat *in toto*.[20] Though Nārāyaṇa has been described as the Supreme Being, yet for Practical devotion sports (*līlā*), activities (*karma*), attributes (*guṇa*) and names (*nāma*) of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa have been specially recommended.

The Kṛṣṇa of Assamese Vaiṣṇavite literature is not exactly the Kṛṣṇa of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism whose eternal abode is in Goloka or Vṛndāvana far above the celestial Vaikuṇṭha of Viṣṇu. The character of Kṛṣṇa of Assam Vaiṣṇavism is entirely based on the description of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and therefore the dual worship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa based on erotic sentiment (*madhura-bhāva*) is singularly absent. Kṛṣṇa exists in the form of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa in celestial Vaikuṇṭha with His liberated devotees and attedants (*Pārṣadas*). For the purpose of devotional meditation the blissful and beatific form of Nārāyaṇa has been specially recommended by Śaṅkaradeva in his *Kīrtana*.[21]

Finite Self: The embodied self is known as jīva. The tendency of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism as regards the nature of individual self is towards recognising its identity with the Supreme Self. Most of the passages describing the nature of jīvātmā speak of its identity with Paramātmā. Jivātmā is nothing but Paramātmā, the only conditional difference being that the former is shrouded by Māyā (*māyā-vṛta*) and the latter is above the influence of Māyā. Unlike the dualists of the Madhava school who hold jīvātmā and Paramātmā to be quite distinct entities or of the qualified monists of the Rāmānuja school according to whoom the individual self is a part of the Supreme Self, the Vaiṣṇavas of Assam headed by Śaṅkaradeva are of opinion that jīvātmā and Paramātmā are not really distinct but identical. The following passage from Śaṅkaradeva's version of Book XII of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* clearly brings out the nature of jīvātmā.

"Ātman is immutable and immortal; it was neither born in the past nor in the present. Birth and death are the characteristic features of body, and out of body a fresh body emerges. Though associated with body, Ātman is yet distinct from body as fire from the fuel it burns. Just as the sky limited within a jar merges with the unlimited sky with the breakage of the jar, the embodied self in a similar way merges with unlimited Brahman after the destruction of body. *Manas* (mind) which determines the quality and activity of body is the product of Māyā and owing to ignorance created by the latter the embodied self associates itself with activities of body. A lamp is supposed to give light so long there is contact between wick, oil and fire ; similarly the noumenal self goes by the name jīva and suffers pain and miseries of the world so long it is associated with body, mind and senses. But know it for certain that the worldly existence really concerns body and the mind and not the self. Though the fire of a lamp apparently vanishes with the cessation of its contact with wick and oil, yet it cannot be said that the fire so long visible has altogether perished. Fire in the shape of great effulgence (*mahājyoti*) can never perish, though it may not be apparently visible. Do not in any way doubt the teaching : 'Though associated with body yet I am not identical with it : I am verily Paramātmā, I am Brahman and Brahman is I".[22]

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[20] *Ete cāṁśa kalāh puṁsaḥ, Kṛṣṇastu Bhagavān svayam.*

[21] Śaṅkaradeva : *Kīrtana*, section IV, pp. 32-38.

A glimpse of the noumenal nature of the self is furnished by Śaṅkaradeva in his *Nimi-Navasiddha-saṁvāda* where he states that in deep sleep the senses along with the ego (*ahaṁkāra*) get merged in Ātman. In that state Ātman remains as the witnessing consciousness. The individual self feels its presence alone and no other consciousness regarding the world is felt.[23]

As regards the origin of the individual self and its relation with Brahman the monistic view seems to be more prominent in the writings of Śaṅkaradeva and his followers. Illustrating this aspect, Śaṅkaradeva writes : "*Manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *ahaṁkāra* (ego) and *indriyas* (senses) have no separate existence apart from Brahman. Diverse forms and appearances are unreal ; only Brahman underlying them is real. Unreal forms and appearances seem real to ignorant ones, as a rope sometimes appears to be a snake owing to illusion. The state of waking (*jāgaraṇa*) or sleep and other functions of body that characterise mind and intellect, take place owing to the influence of Māyā. All phenomena of the world are fleeting and transitory like magic-feats of a magician. Just as a piece of cloud appears in the sky and again disappears in the next moment, in the like manner this world emerges out of Brahman and finally merges in Him. Brahman manifests Himself in all phenomena like the sky that exists in different jars irrespective of their size and form. Brahman is without difference (*bheda-rahita*) and even though He appears to manifest differently in different objects, it is like the process of the sun being reflected on different sheets of water. But the sun can never be more than one. Just as various ornaments of gold appear distinct and many, although the real substance, viz. gold is same, in the like manner Brahman appears to be many under different circumstances to an ignorant, deluded by Māyā. Clouds originate from sun-shine, but the same clouds impede the vision of eyes which also originate from the sun and consequently eyes cannot see the sun (*sūrya-aṁśa cakṣuka tathāpi kare channa*). Similarly the ego emanating from Brahman, envelops the jīva with ignorance. When clouds disappear, the visibility of the sun becomes clear again. In the same manner when the ego is destroyed by the sword of knowledge, the self can perceive himself as Brahman."[24]

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[22] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata*, Book XII (*dvādasa-skandha*), verses 18512-18518, p. 144f.

[23] Śaṅkaradeva : *Nimi-Navasiddha-saṁvāda*, verses 196-97, p. 43f.

Whether the individual self is a part of Brahman or completely identical has been practically answered in the above quotation. There are, however, a limited number of verses where Śaṅkaradeva has described the individual self as a part of God. But considering the prominence given to the illusion theory (*Māyāvāda*) and the unreality of the phenomenal world, the balance leans heavily on the side of Advaita view, according to which Brahman and Ātman are identical. The latter appears as limited and finite because of its association with the body which is a product of Māyā. But, if God and the soul are identical, then where is the scope for devotion which pre-supposes duality? The following passage from *Bhakti-ratnākara* would answer to this doubt.

"He is God, the blissful One, Who controls Māyā and that one is jīva who is dominated by Māyā and who exists in misery. God is all-happiness, all-joy and all-consciousness. His Māyā shrouds the happiness and joy that are inherent in the real nature of the jīva. God is ever-free (*nitya-mukta*), while the jīva is chained to the worldly existence. But the jīva can liberate himself through devotion and service to ever-auspicious God. God is all-purity. He is omniscient and unchangeable. He is the Lord of the three *guṇas* and without beginning and end, while the jīva is ignorant, apparently liable to change because of its association with the body and also unfortunate being under the influence of the *guṇas*".[25]

"God is the controller of the jīva. He of perfect vision sees everything in its true light. He is ever-free from *avidyā* (ignorance) but the jīva being deprived of the true knowledge by *avidyā* remains in bondage. God is *akartṛ* (non-doer) while the jīva is *kartṛ* (doer). . . . Though the jīva is eternal (*nitya*) and indestructible (*avināśī*), yet it apparently undergoes modification because of its association with the imperfection of body and experience misery in consequence of its worldly activities."[26]

"The jīva is not different from Īśvara. It is really immutable and tranquil by nature. But because of its association with Māyā and consequent ignorance it is not conscious of its real nature and origin and thus suffers misery."[27]

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[24] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata*, Book XII, verses 18479-18486 ; p. 1464f.

[25] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnākara*, verses 763-65, p. 172.

[26] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, verses 766-68, p. 173f.

The above extracts indicate the identity of God and soul on the one hand and their conditional difference on the other. This conditional differnece leaves sufficient scope for devotion. To do away with the difference, i.e., to rise above the influence of Māyā, one has to look up to the Lord for His grace. The jīva can get itself liberated from the bondage of the world and realise its identity with God with the help of devotion which begets knowledge.

World: From the foregoing discussion it has become evident that the world, according to Vaiṣṇavite writings, has no reality apart from God. It may be empirically real. The world has been described as *asanta* and *māyāmaya* in innumerable passages and the analogy of the mirage and the rope and the snake has been drawn to show the nature of the world. We have already shown that the nature of the Supreme One is non-dualistic. "God is the only reality, everything else is of the nature of illusion. There is nothing real besides Him. What appears real is actually false."[28] "Whatever you see is illusory and dream-like. Therefore, try to remove illusion by perceiving the Reality underlying all phenomena."[29] "Just as children take a mirage created by sun-shine for water, similarly the ignorant believes or ascribes reality to false or illusory objects and phenomena of the world."[30] These and many other passages, too numerous to quote, speak of God as the only reality and deny reality to the world of diversity of facts and multiplicity of phenomena.

If the phenomenal world is merely an appearance, why does it appear to be real? It is so, because of Māyā, the magical power with which God conjures up the world-show. By using the jugglery of Māyā the Almighty assumes various forms and shapes.[31] The ignorant being deceived by Māyā sees many objects instead of one reality. The inscrutable power of Māyā has a double function of concealing the real nature of Brahman and making Him appear as something else. The aspect of Māyā that conceal is called *āvaraṇa* and the aspect that distorts our knowledge is called *vikṣepana*. Śaṅkaradeva has referred to this double function of Māyā in his version of Book II of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*.[32] Owing to the powerful influence of Māyā people cannot distinguish the real from the unreal. But Māyā, being the power of God, cannot over-power Him. Śaṅkaradeva speaks of the influence of Māyā, the nature of God and the world in the following way : "Brahman alone is real ; the world-creation is illusion. The world is merely a projection of Māyā on Him (*tomār māyāye kare tomāte kalpanā*). Māyā which causes birth and death and envelopes jīvas with ignorance is nothing but a power of God. God manifests Himself in the world by pervading it, but He is not destroyed with the destruction of the world."[33] "The eternal self-luminous Ātman appears to be manifold in the phenomena of the world because of the adjuncts of Māyā. Various shapes and forms are illusory creations and therefore, the learned tries to perceive Brahman, the reality, underlying them."[34]

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[27] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, verse 773, p. 175.

[28] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, verse 111, p. 19.

[29] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata*, Book XI, verse 19262 : *Kirtana*, section XXVII, verse 1815, p. 453.

[30] Mādhavadeva : *Rājasūya Kāvya*, verse 419,

[31] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata*, Book II, verse 498, p. 41.

[32] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, "*avastuka dekhāwaya vastuka-āvari*
sehise mohora māvā jānā nista-kari verse, 650.

Evolution of prakṛti : As regards the evolution of the world of nature, Śaṅkaradeva and other Vaiṣṇavite writers have accepted the process of creation described in Book III of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* with slight modification. According to *Anādi-pātan,* a metrical composition based on Book III of *Bhāgavata-purāṇa,* dealing with cosmology and cosmogony, the world of nature has evolved out of Prakṛti or Māyā produced by God. The process of evolution described by Śaṅkaradeva in the above work may be summarised as follows :

Before the creation, the eternal Brahman alone existed ; prakṛti or Māyā with fourteen worlds, was lying merged in Him. Brahman feeling the loneliness of His existence thought of creating the world through prakṛti in a sportive spirit. He then produced prakṛti or Māyā out of Himself at His will and manifesting Himself as the conscious spirit (puruṣa) produced vibration and impregnated prakṛti. As a result, the first product of prakṛti, viz., *mahat* or *buddhi* (intellect) was produced. From *mahat* the three *ahaṁkāras* (ego) evolved. From *rājasika ahaṁkāra,* the five motor organs and the sense organs evolved and from the *tāmasika ahaṁkāra* the five subtle elements (*tanmātras*) and the five gross elements (*mahābhūtas*) developed. From the *sāttvika ahaṁkāra,* the ten presiding deities of *indriyas* (external organs) and also *manas* (mind) originated. But prakṛti and her products being unconscious, God in the form of conscious spirit (*puruṣa*) pervaded them at various stages of evolution in order to combine those elements and thereby quicken their vibration. Finally the world was produced and God Nārāyaṇa placed Himself within it as the pervading Reality (*paśilā bhitare tār prabhu Nārāyaṇa*)."[35]

Gopālacarana Dvija, a Vaiṣṇavite poet of the early seventeenth century, practically gives the same cosmological account.[36] But neither Śaṅkaradeva nor his followers are clear about the nature of prakṛti described above. According to Advaita Vedānta, prakṛti is simply the magical power of God and not a part of God. But according to the Rāmānuja school, both conscious spirit (*cit*) and unconscious matter (*acit*) are parts of all-inclusive Brahman. Unconscious matter is the source of material objects and is called prakṛti.[37] It has been stated in one place of *Anādi-pātan,* mentioned above, that prakṛti is not an element distinct from God, rather it is part of His body. After producing prakṛti out of Himself, He is described to have spoken to her in the following way :

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[33] Śaṅkaradeva : *Kurukṣetra,* verses 485-88.

[34] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, verses 510-13.

[35] Śaṅkaradeva : *Anādi-pātan,* verses 40-60, pp. 9-13.

"You are my power and I regard you as my vital power. Please create the world as soon as possible ; I have brought you into existence for that purpose. Know it definitely that you are half of my body (*ardha-kāya*) . . . there is neither difference nor non-difference between you and me. You are inferior to me in the sense that you would get yourself merged in me at the time of dissolution."[38]

This passage, literally translated, puts prakṛti in an ambiguous position. If we give emphasis on the word *ardha-kāya* and interpret it literally, the nature of prakṛti would be nearer to Rāmānuja's conception, according to which it is a part of God. If we do not interpret the above word literally and take it in the sense of an inherent power of God and put emphasis on the word *bhinnābhinna* (difference and non-difference) the nature of prakṛti would be similar to Māyā of the Advaita doctrine, according to which Māyā as the power of God is neither different from, nor identical with Him, i.e., the relation is indescribable (*anirvācvā*).

But so far as the process of evolution of the phenomenal world from the primal prakṛti is concerned, it is neither *pañcīkaraṇa* (combination of five) of Advaita Vedanta, nor *trivṛtkaraṇa* (triplication) of the Rāmānuja school. It is more in accord with Sāṁkhya with a theistic bias. According to Advaita Vedānta, there at first arises out of Brahman the five subtle elements in the following order—*ākāśa* (ether), *vāyu* (air), *agni* (fire), *ap* (water) and *kṣiti* (earth). These five again mixed up in five different ways

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[36] Gopālacaraṇa Dvija : *Bhāgavata,* Book III, verses 792-860, p. 67ff.

[37] Datta & Chatterji : *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy,* p. 428.

[38] Śaṅkaradeva : *Anādi-pātan,* verses 49-50.

śuniyo prakṛti eko guṇe nohā hīn I
tomāre āmāre kiñciteko nāhi bhin II
mora nija śakati samyake dekho prāṇ I
satvare kariyo māyā jagata nirmān II
tomāka cetāilo āmi ehi abhiprāya I
jāniyoka bhāle tumi mora ardha-kāya II
tomāre āmāre eko nāhi bhinnābhinna I
mota yāte līna yāhā ehikhāni hīna. II

in a certain proportion give rise to the five gross elements. This process is known as the combination of five.[39] According to Rāmānuja, the subtle matter (*acit*) impelled by the omnipotent will of God is gradually transformed into three kinds of subtle elements : fire, water and earth. These three elements manifested in the *guṇas* further mix up and finally give rise to all gross objects. The combination of the above three is, therefore, called *trivṛtkaraṇa*.[40] The evolutionary process narrated by Śaṅkaradeva and the other Vaiṣṇavites, follows the Śāṁkhya order of evolution. The Puranic literature in general and the *Bhāgavata* in particular have accepted with certain modification the Sāṁkhya process of evolution on a theistic basis.[41] The influence of the creative process of evolution described in the *purāṇas* and more particularly the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* is, therefore, evident on the writings of Śaṅkaradeva and his followers.

Manas, Buddhi and Ahaṁkāra: The Vaiṣṇavite writers, particularly Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, have defined the nature and function of *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *ahaṁkāra* (ego) and *citta* (seat of consciousness). Mādhavadeva defines *manas* as that internal organ which has for its functions conation and negation of conation. The functions of *buddhi* are ascertainment and decision (*niścaya dharma*). The function of *ahaṁkāra* is the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. The function of *citta* has not been defined by him. But it has been described as the abode of pure knowledge (*ṣuddha jñānara ālaya*).[42] Śaṅkaradeva's description of these internal organs differs to a certain extent from that of Mādhavadeva. In *Anādi-pātan* Śaṅkaradeva has said that *manas* has four modes (*vṛtti*) and takes four different names according to those modes. The names are—*buddhi, ahaṁkāra, manas* and *citta,* but in reality all these are but aspects of the mind (*eka mana cāri rūpa śunā tāra nāma, mana buddhi ahaṁkāra āru citta nāma*).[43] The following passage from Śaṅkaradeva deserves to be quoted to show his conception of these internal organs.

"Now, listen to the various names of the mind under different conditions. When the mind hovers from one object to another and proposes to do many things, but could never settle on any matter it is called *manas*. When the mind acts as the faculty of conation and doubt (*saṁkalpa* and *vikalpa*) it is called *buddhi*. When the mind becomes the instrument of pious deeds and honest thinking it is known as *citta*. When again it shows arrogance and egotism by taking pride as the doer of all actions it goes by the name *ahaṁkāra*. Thus, the mind assumes different names according to its functions just like an actor who assumes different roles in the same performance by donning various costumes (*kācile naṭaka yena bhinna rūpa dekhi*). The world is the projection of the mind; the different states of awaking, sleeping and dreaming are its moods. The mind exists in the all creatures and on it the reflection of God through the self is cast. That one (self) is called jīva which indentifies itself with the mind. The process of the self's identification with mind resembles the process of iron melting in fire—the process in which iron and fire become indistinguishable. Whenever the mind is unhappy, the jīva thinks itself unhappy and wherever the mind goes the jīva considers itself moving. With the death of the body over which the mind dominates the jīva thinks itself dead. The behaviour of the jīva is exactly like the phenomenon of the sun being reflected on a sheet of disturbed water. When the disturbed sheet of water comes to the normal state, the reflected sun (*pratibimba*) and the water on which such reflection is cast, can be easily distinguished. Whoever considers the actions of the mind to be his own work gets entangled in the world. It is in the mind that the fourteen worlds exist, it is the mind again that begets merit, sin and hell and also discriminates between 'mine' and 'thine'. All other senses or organs follow the mind. It is the cause of the repetition of birth and death."[44]

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[39] Datta & Chaterji : *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, p. 445.
[40] Datta & Chaterji : *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, p. 410.
[41] S. N. Dasgupta : *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. IV, p. 68ff.
[42] Mādhavadeva : *Nāmaghoṣā*, verses 92, 94-96.
[43] Śaṅkaradeva : *Anādi-patan*, verse 62, p.13.

From these illustrations it is clear that Mādhavadeva accepted the Vedāntic interpretation of the three internal faculties, viz. *manas*, *buddhi* and *ahaṁkāra*. His conception of *citta* as the abode of pure knowledge resembles *citta* of the Yoga system. "What the Sāṁkhya called *mahat* the Yoga calls *citta*. It is the first product of prakṛti, though it is taken in a comprehensive sense so as to include intellect, self-consciousness and mind."[45]

Śaṅkaradeva, it appears, confuses *manas* with *antaḥkaraṇa* of the Vedānta. According to Advaita Vedānta the internal organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*) undergoes changes or modification of form. The modification which reveals objects is called *vṛtti*. The *vṛtti* or modes of the internal organ are of four different kinds : indetermination (*saṁśaya or aniścaya*), determination (*niścaya*), self-consciousness (*ātmābhimāna*) and remembrance (*smaraṇa*). The one internal organ is called *manas* when it has the mode of indetermination; it is called *buddhi* or understanding when it has the mode of determination; it is called attention (*citta*) when it has the mode of concentration and remembrance.[46] Śaṅkaradeva's four modes of *manas* are nothing but the four modes of *antaḥkaraṇa*. Another confusion that appears to have been made by Śaṅkaradeva is in regard to the function of *buddhi*. It is stated both in the Vedānta and the Sāṁkhya that *saṁkalpa* and *vikalpa* are the function of the mind (*manas*) and not of *buddhi*. In the Yoga system the word *citta* is taken in a comprehensive sense so as to include intellect, self-consciousness and mind.[47] *Citta* in that light resembles *manas* of Śaṅkaradeva.

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[44] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, verses 63-70, p. 14ff.

[45] Rādhākrishnan : *Indian Philosophy*, vol. II, p. 345.

[46] Rādhākrishnan : Ibid, vol. II, p. 487.

Attitude towards incarnations and gods: Assamese Vaiṣṇavas like other sects of Hinduism also believe in the theory of incarnation. The theory that God descends on this world from time to time in various shapes to redeem the world, is accepted by them. Śaṅkaradeva in the opening chapter of his celebrated work *Kīrtana* enumerates twentyfour incarnations of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu. Mādhavadeva in his *Nāmaghoṣā* makes obeisance to the ten principal *avatāras* of Viṣṇu. God's descent on the earth has two objectives, i.e., (i) to redeem the world from the evil forces and (ii) to favour his devotees who, by dwelling on His *līlās* and *caritras*, might be able to spurn even the four *puruṣārthas* including liberation. Excepting Kṛṣṇa, who is considered the Supreme Being Himself, all other incarnations are regarded as partial manifestations. Of these, ten (Matsya, Kūrma, Narasiṁha, Vāmana, Paraśurāma, Halirāma, Varāha, Śrīrāma, Buddha and Kalki) are regarded as major ones and the rest are minor manifestations of God. The ten *avatāras* of Viṣṇu mentioned above are the objects of special veneration, and they are generally treated (with the exception of Buddha and Kalki) on equal footing with Kṛṣṇa. The most important position, amongst the partial *avatāras*, is held by Rāma who for all practical purposes has been identified with Kṛṣṇa, and a considerable Rāmite literature developed centering round him.

But this belief in the incarnation theory easily led the followers of Śaṅkaradeva to raise the latter to the status of an *avatāra*. Śaṅkaradeva did not claim himself as an *avatāra*, rather everywhere in his writings he described himself as a servant of Kṛṣṇa. His followers, to whom his extraordinary activities appeared as superhuman, naturally looked upon him with a sense of awe and reverence which ultimately raised him to the position of an *avatāra*. All the biographies dealing with the life and activities of Śaṅkaradeva and his followers depict the reformer as an *avatāra*. But in practice, a cult enjoining the worship of Śaṅkaradeva never developed in Assam.[48]

The attitude of Assamese Vaiṣṇavas towards the gods of the Hindu pantheon may briefly be summarised here.

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[47] Rādhākrishnan : Ibid, vol. II, p. 345.

[48] Mādhavadeva for the first time in one of his *Guru-bhaṭimā* (prayer to Guru) expressed that Śaṅkaradeva was a partial *avatāra* of God.

The unity of Godhead, in the sense in which *Korān* or Kabirpanthis preached it, was no part of Assam Vaiṣṇavism. On the contrary, Assamese Vaiṣṇavas were eager to prove the superiority of Kṛṣṇa to other gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. They acknowledged the existence of various gods enumerated in the purāṇas, but all gods owe their existence to Hari. All of them including Brahmā and Śiva are subservient to Him and they are compared to leaves and branches of a tree of which Viṣṇu is considered the main stem or root. Therefore, none else but Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu should be worshipped or adored. Other deities would be automatically pleased if Viṣṇu, the support of all, could be propitiated. Recourse to deities other than Viṣṇu is similar to the taking of poison discarding nectar. A devotee who worships any other deity besides Viṣṇu is compared to an unchaste woman. Because of this uncompromising attitude towards the gods of the Hindu Pantheon other than Viṣṇu and his incarnations, Assamese Vaiṣṇavism is known as *Ekaśaraṇa-dharma* (religion of single-minded devotion).

Liberation: The summum-bonum of the Hindu life is the attainment of liberation which not only acquits man of the ordeal of repeated birth and death, but begets divine bliss and happiness by establishing a close communion with God. The liberation (*mukti*) has been described in the *Bhāgavata* (2/10/6) as the attainment of the jīva's natural state and function by relinquishing its otherwise imposed state and function. *Mukti* can be attained during life time (*jīvanmukti*), as well as after death (*videhamukti*). The principal Vaiṣṇava sects of India, viz., those of Rāmānuja, Madhava, Nimbārka, Vallabha and Caitanya have not recognised *jīvanmukti*, i.e., liberation during life time. Assamese Vaiṣṇava saints have recognised both the above types of liberation. Following the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (3/29/13), Assamese Vaiṣṇavas have recognised and enumerated five kinds of *videhamukti*, viz., (1) *sālokyo* (being in the same plane with God), (2) *sāmīpya* (nearness to God), (3) *sārūpya* (likeness to God), (4) *sārṣṭi* (equalling God in glory) *sāyujya* (absorption in God). In different episodes of *Kīrtana*, Śaṅkaradeva has shown that devotees like Ajāmila, Gajendra, Kamsa, and Vipra-Dāmodara attained *sālokyo*, *sāmīpya*, *sārūpya* and *lina-mukti* respectively. Śukadeva the expositor of the *Bhāgavata*, Balirāja and a few others have been described as *jīvanmukta puruṣa*. Of the five kinds of *videhamukti*, Vaiṣṇavas do not look with favour the *sāyujya-mukti* where the complete absorption in God deprives jīvas of the sweetness and bliss associated with Bhakti.

The very fact that the Vaiṣṇavas discard the *sāyujya* form of Mukti because it deprives them of the devotonal pleasure and vision of the beatific

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[49] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnākara*, verse 481, p. 110.

form of the Lord, proves that Vaiṣṇavas preferred Bhakti to Mukti. As a matter of fact, all the devotional writings of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and others, regard Bhakti as more important than Mukti. Mādhavadeva opens his celebrated work *Nāma-ghoṣā* with an obeisance to those devotees who are indifferent to Mukti and fervently seeks for passionate devotion (*rasamayī bhakti*). There are numerous lines in *Bhakti-ratnākara, Ratnāvalī* and *Nāma-ghoṣā* and *Kīrtana,* where Bhakti has been preferred to to Mukti. In a few passages of *Bhakti-ratnākara* it has been said that a true devotee never hankers after *sāyujya-mukti* and considers the state of Bhakti superior to that of Mukti. In another place of the same book it is again stated that the devotees of Kṛṣṇa refuse even *sālokya-mukti* in Vaikuṇṭha if it is offered without providing any opportunity for practising devotion.[50] In *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* also, it is stated that though the state of liberation is all happiness, yet Bhakti is superior to Mukti, in as much as, the latter is devoid of joy inherent in the service to the Lord, while the bliss of Mukti is inherent in the former (*bhakti*).[51] The term Mukti in the above passage, however, should be taken to mean *sāyujya-mukti* where a blissful state is attained by the soul by merging itself in God, but loses its separate identity to taste the happiness and joy of serving or witnessing the beatific form of God.

But this notion about Bhakti does not mean that the Vaiṣṇavas are averse to Mukti altogether. What they mean is that the devotees should not direct their efforts to the attainment of salvation alone. It would mean some sort of selfishness on the part of a devotee if his devotion were directed solely towards attaining salvation. Liberation would come automatically in its own time ; it is inherent in Bhakti. As such, a separate effort solely directed to attain liberation is not only unnecessary but also undesirable. In this respect Nārada, Sanaka, Sanātana and such other liberated beings (*jivanmukta puruṣa*) stand as model devotees.

Heaven and future existence : Vaiṣṇavas have no faith in that heaven which is generally attained by performing various sacrifices and rituals. Heaven attained by *sakāma-karma* cannot grant permanent bliss and happiness, nor can it free the jīvas from rebirth. As soon as the merits are exhausted jīvas come down again to the earth and go through the process of birth and death.

But, Vaiṣṇavas who worship and adore Visnu without any desire or motive, attain Vaikuṇṭha the divine sphere of Viṣṇu from which there is no fall. *Kāla* (time) and Māyā, consisting of the three *guṇas,* have no hold over this divine region. It is a region of pure bliss and happiness where the devotees can have the beatific vision of the Lord constantly.[52]

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[50] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, verse 483.

[51] Mādhavadeva : *Bhakti-ratnāvalī,* verse 52, p. 11.

The released self attains the nature of God in Vaikuṇṭha. It desires nothing else and has no chance of returning to *saṁsāra*. The picture of Vaikuṇṭha where the liberated souls dwell is not very much different from the popular description of heaven with beautiful lakes having golden lotuses, trees laden with delicious fruits, beautiful damsels and gentle breeze to cheer them. Such description of Vaikuṇṭha is found in abundance in the Vaisnavite literature. In case of *sāyujya-mukti* which means complete absorption in God, no independent existence is possible and for them, Vaikuṇṭha has no meaning.

Influence of esoteric yoga : Though the Vaiṣṇava reformers and saint-poets have denied the efficacy of Yoga and the tantric practices as methods of realising God in Kali age, yet they have incorporated the elements of the esoteric Yoga in a few religious works. Many a sect of medieval India like the Nāth-panthīs and the Buddhist-sahajīyās exclusively prescribe the esoteric Yoga as a method of spiritual realisation. The esoteric Yoga teachings, the analyses of the body into plexuses (*cakras*) and nerves, the awakening of the dormant spiritual power (*Kuṇḍalinī*) for the spiritual realisation, the belief in the *piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa* theory that the body is the epitome of the universe and such other teachings and beliefs have greatly influenced the teachings and practices of a number of medieval Vaiṣṇava sects. The Vaiṣṇavite-sahajīyās, the Bāuls of Bengal, the Kabir-panthīs of Northern India, to mention only a few, have not only incorporated the esoteric Yoga teachings about *cakras* and *nāḍis* etc., in their writings but they have prescribed also the regressive path (*ultā-sādhanā*) enjoined in their teachings for spiritual realisation.[53]

The teachings and devotional practices of the Vaiṣṇavism of Assam are entirely based on those of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and the *Gītā*, and as such, the presence of the esoteric Yoga elements cannot naturally be expected. In fact, the practical application (*sādhanā*) of these elements has never been considered indispensable in the devotional process of Assam Vaiṣṇavism. But traces of the theoretical knowledge of yogic practices are not rare in their writings. Śaṅkaradeva in his *Anādi-pātan* gives a short account of the *piṇḍa* (body) as an epitome of the *brahmāṇḍa* (universe) and also describes briefly the six *cakras* having different number of petals, the three principal nerves viz., *Iḍā*, *Piṅgalā* and *Suṣumnā* and the serpent power *Kundalinī* and the winds (*daśa-vāyu*)[54] But, besides giving a theoretical description of these elements, he has no where inculcated upon his disciples the practise of *ultā-sādhanā* or *kāyā-sādhanā* in their religious pursuits. A few works, apparently of later origin, some of which are ascribed to Mādhavadeva with a view to giving them an authoritative stamp, have discussed this subject elaborately. Of this type of works, *Amulya-ratna, Gupta-maṇi* and *Gupta-sāra* may be specially mentioned. These works, specially *Gupta-maṇi,* have elaborately discussed the plexuses with petals and letters appertaining to them, the nerves, the location of the sun and the moon and of the different deities, the process of awakening *Kuṇḍalinī* and raising her to *sahasrāra,* the plexus of the highest cerebral region, the location of different holy places within the body and such other connected topics. Though these works do not carry any authoritative value like *Kīrtana* or *Nāma-ghoṣā* yet they are very popular amongst those section of devotees who are known as members of the so-called 'inner circle' (*bhitar-pakīyā samāja*) i.e., the esoteric circle of devotees.

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[52] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata*, Book II, verses 502-3, 619-20.

[53] K. Mallick : *Nāth Sampradāyer Itihāsh, Sādhana O Darśan*, p. 511ff.
P. D. Barthwal : *Nirguna School of Hindi Poetry*, chapt IV.

[54] Śaṅkaradeva : *Anādi-pātan*, verse 199-210, p. 45f.

In the ordination ceremony of satras as obtained today, a neophyte is acquainted with the system of body-analyses described in the esoteric Yoga. It is argued in favour of imparting these teachings that unless a devotee knows his body as the epitome of the universe and as the abode of different deities, his knowledge of the world, God and the self cannot be complete and consequently the progress in the path of spiritual realisation becomes difficult. But whatever argument might be advanced in support of imparting these teachings on the esoteric Yoga, it cannot be denied that the earlier Vaiṣṇava reformers have nowhere categorically stated about the the indispensability of these teachings and the fundamental works of the sect are absolutely free from the esoteric Yoga elements. *Gupta-maṇi, Amulyaratna, Gupta-sāra* and even *Anādi-pātan* are not recognised as authoritative works by the principal Vaiṣṇava sects of Assam.

General estimate : From the foregoing discussion, the most important philosophical tendency that could be discerned in Assamese Vaiṣṇavism is its inclination towards Advaitism. It is true that here and there contradictory statements suggesting dualistic tendency are also to be found, but the predominence of monistic ideas cannot be denied. Acceptance of doctrine of Māyā of Idealistic Monism, the recognition of the identity of jīva with Īśvara; have unmistakably lent a monistic colouring to the philosophical teachings of Assamese Vaiṣṇavites. But it cannot be said that the philosophy of the Vaiṣṇavism of Assam is exactly identical with that of Śaṅkaracāryya and his followers.

In Śaṅkarācāryya's Advaitism where the Reality has been conceived as transcendental indeterminate and impersonal one there is little scope for devotion. Īśvara, again, according to the Advaitins is not the highest Reality. Loving devotion or Bhakti is generally possible when the highest Reality is conceived as a *saguṇa* one. Assamese Vaiṣṇavas have enjoined the worship of or devotion to the personal and at the same time immanent and transcendental God Nārāyaṇa. Now, according to Advaitins God is immanent and personal from the empirical stand-point (*vyavahārika dṛṣṭi*) and He is an object of worship only from a lower stand-point. But Śaṅkaradeva and other Assamese Vaiṣṇavas have nowhere stated or suggested that devotion to Nārāyaṇa is only a step from which one can mount up to the higher level at which the indeterminate and transcendental God can be realised. Neither have they suggested anywhere in their writings that the personal God Nārāyaṇa is unreal in the ultimate analysis and He is real only from the practical view-point. On the contrary, Nārāyaṇa has been described as the Absolute God ; He is real and eternal (*nitya*). Worship of or devotion to Nārāyaṇa has been prescribed at all stages of the spiritual progress and no distinction has been made between *vyavahārika* and *pāramārthika* view points. The real and eternal quality (*nityatva*) of the beatific form of Nārāyaṇa has been stressed in several passages of the writings of Assamese Vaiṣṇavites.

For example, in the Assamese version of Chapter IX of Book II of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa,* Śaṅkaradeva has suggested the eternalness (*nityatva*) of the form of Nārāyaṇa in a few verses which are said to have been spoken by the Lord to the creator, Brahmā. He is said to have remarked : "People remaining in constant touch with the association of devotees should seek me through devotion and self-surrender ; the knowledge of God would then be revealed to them. They should practise *śravana* and *kīrtana* constantly. The form (*rūpa*) which I have revealed to you today is truly my real form."[55] The eternal quality of the form (*vigraha*) of Nārāyaṇa has been further stressed in the *Anādi-pātan* by Śaṅkaradeva and in the Assamese version of Book III of the *Bhāgavata* by Gopālacaraṇa Dvija. In the latter work, Brahmā, the creator, in course of his prayer to Nārāyaṇa is stated to have said : "Some persons may declare that unqualified Brahman alone is real and eternal. But in reply to their assertion I can say that this blissful and beatific form in which You have appeared before me and which You have assumed for the benefit of Your devotees, is not different from the Absolute Brahman (*āta pare punu, Brahma rūpa yito, bhinna kari nāhi kay*). To this form of Thine all incarnations owe their origin ; [56] By referring to a passage of the *Bhāgavata* (Book VIII, chapt. VI) Śaṅkaradevā further tries to show in his *Bhakti-ratnākara* that the form (*ākāra*) of Nārāyaṇa is real (*satya*) and eternal (*nitya*). The following extract from *Bhakti-ratnākara* deserves notice in this connection.

The gods headed by Brahmā addressed Nārāyaṇa thus : "This form in which You have appeared before us, O Puruṣottama, is real and eternal.

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[55] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata,* Book II, verse 653, p. 53.

[56] Gopālacaraṇa Dvija : *Bhāgavata,* Book III, verses 894-96, p. 73f.

There is no limitation to this form. Those who thrive for liberation by resorting to the Vedic or tantric practices worship this form. It is the best of Your forms and there is no other form higher than this. We the gods form parts of Your World-form (*viśva-mūrti*) and the three worlds exist in You. You are self-differentiated and there is no end or limitation to Your person![57] Instances can be multiplied, but the above extracts will indicate the attitude of the Vaiṣṇavas towards the person of God.

It has been already stated that the Vaiṣṇava writers have recognised both the *nirguṇa* and the *saguṇa* characters of God, though they have recommended the latter aspect for the purpose of devotion. But how can both the *nirguṇa* and the *saguṇa* aspects be real and eternal at the same time? From the logical point of view one must be taken as unreal; or if real, it is so only from an empirical stand-point. This inconsistency has not been explained or removed. Moreover, in many a passage the person (*mūrti*) of Nārāyaṇa or Kṛṣṇa has been described as *līlā-vigraha* (sportive form) and as *māyika* (having the adjunct of *māyā*). If it is considered as the sportive form, then how can it be eternal and real from the *pāramārthika* or the ultimate view-point? These questions have not been discussed or explained at all.

Some confusion could be noticed as regards their view of liberation also. The Vaiṣṇava writers have not only recognised *jīvan-mukti* and *lina-mukti* but also four other kinds of Mukti. On the other hand, Bhakti has been exalted to a higher position than Mukti and have prescribed Bhakti even after the stage of liberation. Because of the exalted position assigned to Bhakti, it has been described as *Parama-puruṣārtha* or the highest ideal. But the question here naturally arises that if Īśvara and the jīva are identical and if their apparent difference is conditional only, then where is the scope for devotion when God and the soul become one entity? The term Bhakti or devotion expresses a relation between two beings; one superior and the other inferior. But according to the non-dualistic view, the difference or apparent duality ceases as soon as one attains liberation. If Īśvara and the jīva are regarded as identical and their difference as conditional only, as stated by Śaṅkaradeva and his followers, then the logical course would have been for them to recognise *jīvan-mukti* and *līna-mukti* only as the Advaitins do. But the Assamese Vaiṣṇavite writings have admitted also four other types of *videha-mukti,* viz., *sālokya, sāmīpya, sārūpya* and *sārṣṭi.* These four types of Mukti are commended by Vaiṣṇavas because they afford opportunities for continuing the process of devotion even after the stage of liberation is reached. Happiness and bliss connected with the process of devotion and also arising out of the close proximity with the Lord are absent in the case of liberation where complete absorption of the individual soul in God takes place. When the jīva and Īśvara are considered completely identical and undifferentiated in the liberated stage, the above four types of liberation, where some sort of dualism exists, become incompatible with strict Monism and consequently they cannot be called real and final forms of liberation. There cannot be any scope for devotion in the final liberation where complete merger of the soul in God takes place. It may be possible in the *jīvan-mukta* stage when the liberated being, for the sheer love of devotion, may go on with the process of devotion by making an imaginary distinction between himself and God. But so far as the Vaiṣṇava writers of Assam are concerned they have not made any attempt to justify or explain these discrepancies. The possibility of continuing the process of devotion or service to God after the stage of liberation is reached, does not appear to be feasible ; it rather appears incompatible with strict Advaitism.

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[57] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnākara,* verses 126-27, p. 32.

The above discussion is enough to show that the Vaiṣṇavas of Assam did not develop a consistent philosophy, though the inclination towards Advaitism is more prominent as that of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* which undoubtedly exercised the greatest influence in shaping its faith and teachings. As regards the prominence of monistic views in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, Dr. S. N. Dasgupta writes : "It may generally appear rather surprising to find such extreme Idealistic Monism in the *Bhāgavata*, but there are numerous passages which show that an extreme form of monism recurs now and then as one of the principal lines of thought."[58] The same eminent authority on Indian Philosophy writes in another place : "The emphasis on the illusory character of the world is very much stronger in the passages that are found in the *Bhāgavata*, Book XI, than in passages that deal with Kapila's philosophy of Sāṁkhya ; and though the two treatments may not be interpreted as radically different, yet the monistic tendency which regards all worldly experiences as illusory, is so remarkably stressed that it very nearly destroys the realistic note which is the special feature of the Sāṁkhya school of thought ![59] Mr. B. Upadhyāya in his work on Indian philosophy also categorically speaks of the predominence of the Advaita view on the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*.[59]

The influence of Śrīdhara Svāmī's commentary, lends further weight to the monistic tendency inherent in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. Śrīdhara is generally believed to have belonged to the Advaita school of thought and hence it is no wonder that his commentary *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā*, would interpret the Bhāgavata from the Advaitin's point of view. Regarding Śrīdhara Svāmī's view, Dr. S. K. Dey writes : "About the time of Śrīdhara there must have grown a tendency of tempering the severe monistic idealism of the Advaita school with devotional worship of a personal God. Śrīdhara appears to have given a definite expression to this tendency in his well-known commentaries on the *Bhāgavata,* the *Gītā* and the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* in which he acknowledges Śaṅkara's teachings as authoritative but considers Bhakti as the best means of Advaita-mukti."[60] All the Assamese translators of the *Bhāgavata,* the *Gītā* and the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* have acknowledged the help received from the commentaries of Śrīdhara Śvāmi.

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[58] S. N. Dasgupta : *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. IV. p. 33.

[59] S. N. Dasgupta : Ibid, p. 33.

[59] B. Upadhyaya : *Bhāratīya Darśana*, p. 476.

The *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* which exercises a unique influence over the Vaisnavas of Assam, has certain philosophical ambiguities and inconsistencies ; that is why Dr. Dasgupta writes : "The position of God and His relation to the world is somewhat ambiguous in the *Bhāgavata-purāna.*"[61] The sectarian commentators and interpreters have tried to remove those ambiguities in the light of their own sectarian beliefs. Vaiṣṇavism of Assam has no such sectarian commentators or commentaries of its own and therefore, holds Śrīdhara's commentaries as authoritative ones. But in spite of Śrīdhara as their guide there are certain inconsistencies and gaps in their philosophical teachings. This may be attributed mainly to the popular nature of their writings. They did not compose or translate with a view to formulating a speculative system and their writings which have incorporated certain philosophical teachings were mainly intended for the mass. Therefore, abstruse philosophical discussions of Śrīdhara have been left out. Mere summaries of the original chapters of the *Bhāgavata* in the light of Śrīdhara Svāmī's commentary have been given in the Assamese versions. The philosophical or technical arguments and discussions of Śrīdhara have been either summarised or partially left out. For example, the highly philosophical benedictory verse (*maṅgalācaraṇa*) of Book I of the *Bhāgavata,* which has been elaborately commented upon by Śrīdhara from the monistic stand-point, has been totally omitted by Śaṅkaradeva in his rendering. He has substituted it by a simple salutation to Viṣṇu. Moreover, though Śaṅkaradeva and his followers have followed Śrīdhara's commentory in a general way, they have not always accepted it in toto. Where Śrīdhara's commentary appears to them in direct conflict with their *Ekaśaraṇa-dharma,* they have not hesitated to deviate from Śrīdhara's views. This popular trait of their writings, therefore, is responsible for the lack of a systematic philosophy of the sect.

(B) *RELIGIOUS*

Bhakti : It is unnecessary and also beyond the scope of this work to go into the origin and history of the Bhakti movement in India. It will be sufficient here to state that like all other medieval Vaiṣṇava schools of India, the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement in Assam is also essentially and primarily based upon Bhakti. In the *Śāndilya-sūtra*, Bhakti is defined as the highest attachment (*parānurakti*) and in the *Naradiya Bhakti-sūtra* it is said to be a mental state of the highest love and bliss (*paramapremarūpā, amṛtarupāca*).[62] But Assamese Vaiṣṇava scriptures have not quoted anywhere the above works; rather they have frequently quoted from the *Bhāgavata*, the *Gītā* and other Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas to define the nature of Bhakti. The absolute self-surrender to God and a feeling of joy angd happiness in serving or worshipping Him, are the two main characteristics of Bhakti. It is based on faith and not on dialectics. Vaiṣṇavas in Assam, like their brothers-in-faith of other provinces, regard Bhakti as both means and end of human existence. The superiorty and efficacy of Bhakti over all other modes of worship have been repeated in various devotional and religious works of the sect. In fact, all the religious compendiums of the sect, and they are quite large a number, exclusively deal with the various aspects of Bhakti. Besides the celebrated *Bhakti-ratnāvali* of Viṣṇupurī, there are *Bhakti-ratnākara* and *Bhakti-pradīpa* of Śaṅkaradeva, *Nāma-ghoṣā* of Mādhavadeva, *Bhakti-viveka* and *Śaraṇa-saṁhitā* of Bhaṭṭadeva, *Ghoṣā-ratna* of Gopāla Miśra, *Bhakti-premāvalī* of Narottama Ṭhākur, *Bhakti-ratna* of Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur and many others. All these works are unanimous in holding that in Kali age there is no better mode of worship than Bhakti, in as much as God can be easily pleased by Bhakti alone. Further, it is easy to practise and accessible to all irrespective of caste and creed, the high and the low.[63] The other two paths of religion viz., of knowledge and action or rituals are regarded as inferior to the path of devotion and not suitable for all classes of people in Kali-age.[64] Meditation (*dhyāna*) in the Satya-yuga, sacrifices (*yajña*) in Tretā-yuga, ritualistic worship (*Pūjā*) in Dvāpara and Bhakti in Kali, are the most appropriate ways of seeking God. Bhakti is the *yuga-dharma* i.e. the suitable religion in Kali-yuga and no other path is as efficacious as it is.[65]

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[60] S. K. Dey : *Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal,* p. 14.

[61] S. N. Dasgupta : *History of Indian Philosophy,* vol. IV, p. VIII.

That the Vaiṣṇava reformers regard Bhakti as the summum-bonum of life and even superior to Mukti, needs no further elaboration here. In fact, Bhakti is conceived as "be all and end all" of life. Their attitude towards Bhakti is amply illustrated in the following lines of Śaṅkaradeva :—"Bhakti is mother, father, friend, brother, relation, and the highest treasure of life.

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[62] R. M. Nath (edted) : *Nārada-Bhakti-sūtra* 2/3, *Śāndilya-sūtra* 1/2.

[63] Śaṅkaradeva : *Kirtana*, section VII, verse 381, p. 96.

[64] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnākara*, verse 509; *Bhāgavata*, Book I verse 41; Book VI, verse 77-81 (quoted by K. Medh in *Śaṅkaradevar Vāṇi*)

[65] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnākara*, verses 714-62, p. 117;

Bhakti is the movement (*gati*), the desire (*mati*) and the guiding force of life. It is the highest desire and wealth (*vitta*) and the germ of liberation; it is the solace of life, the vital breath of the body as it were. There is no other way of life save and except Bhakti in this world and the next."[66]

Bhakti, jñāna and karma: However efficacious the ways of jñāna and karma might have been in the past, they are superseded now and are worthless as compared to Bhakti. Without an admixture of Bhakti none of them can lead to salvation, while Bhakti alone is sufficient to beget liberation. Knowledge without Bhakti is futile; the process of seeking God by the path of knowledge is compared to the husking seedless paddy.[67] On the other hand, knowledge is inherent in the process of devotion; it comes easily to a person who is deeply devoted to the Lord. "The Vedas say that knowledge begets liberation. But know it for certain that knowledge so highly spoken of in the Vedas, is inherent in Bhakti. Knowledge comes automatically in the course of devotion. People uselessly mortify themselves by practising Yoga."—so says Śaṅkaradeva. Gopālacaraṇa Dvija, in the Assamese version of Book III of the *Bhāgavata,* admits the necessity of knowledge for liberation; but according to him, knowledge comes as a matter of course in the process of devotion and no separate effort is necessary for it. Mādhavadeva says that *ātma-bodha* (self-knowledge) comes through the grace of God.[68] One need not be a good scholar to be a devotee of God. There are several incidents narrated in the medieval biographies where Śaṅkaradeva is depicted to have rebuked persons adopting the path of knowledge, i.e. *sanyāsa.* The necessity of knowledge for self-realisation or liberation is not altogether ruled out of their religious path. Knowledge is essential in the process of devine realisation, but a separate effort is unnecessary for it; it comes automatically after a certain stage of Bhakti is reached. Their objection was not against knowledge itself but against the path of knowledge or renunciation, i.e. *sanyāsa.* The true liberation in the opinion of the Vaiṣṇavas is not the attainment of or absorption in attributeless Brahman, but the eternal contiguity and the devotional service of God by means of Bhakti. The path of attaining attributeless Brahman by meditation (*dhyāna*) or Yoga is beset with many difficulties and even when it is attained, it deprives the seeker of the divine joy and pleasure inherent in Bhakti. The vision of the beatific aspect of God is denied to him. Similarily Vaiṣṇava reformers are not against *karma*-in general, but against particular types of action. Their attitude towards all action is on the line of the *Gitā* which exalts desireless action performed in the name of God. Of the three types of ceremonial work *nitya, naimittika* and *kāmya,* they are deadly against the last type of work where selfish motive to gain worldly pleasure or the attainment of heaven predominates. The other two types of work viz., the *nitya* and the *naimittika* have been prescribed till a certain stage of the development of Bhakti is reached. But all works, daily and occasional, must be productive of Bhakti.[69] In the initial stage, a devotee should not give up daily and occasional works prescribed by the *smṛtis,* but those should be performed as steps to the higher end of the *Viṣṇu-bhakti.*[70] Bhaṭṭadeva in his celebrated *Bhakti-viveka* says that a person cannot escape from performing *nitya* and *naimittika* duties but he should not indulge in the *kāmya-karma.*[71]

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[66] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata,* Book X, verse 10864, p. 866.

[67] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnākara,* verses 903-4, p. 202
Kīrtana, section X, verses 745-46.

[68] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata,* Book XI, verse 19322, p. 1377.
Gopalacaraṇa Dvija : *Bhāgavata,* Book III, verse 1729, Mādhavadeva : *Nāmaghoṣā,* verse 617.

But in performing the above duties everything should be offered in the name of Viṣṇu. Those who do the above duties without the basic obligation of the devotion to Hari are barbarous (*pāṣaṇḍa*) no doubt.[72]

As regards the *kāmya-karma,* the Vaiṣṇava reformers hold the view that it should be avoided altogether. But those who are not capable of performing desireless action based on pure Bhakti, they may start with *sakāma,* or *kāmya karma.*[73] But this should be entirely confined to the preliminary stage and should not be practised for an indefinite length. When a devotee rises above wordly attachment and fully merges himself in the devotion of Hari, he is required to perform neither the *nitya* and *naimittaka* works nor *Pañca-jajña.* When Bhakti is fully attained, all those duties become redundant.[74]

Types of Bhakti : According to devotional scriptures, Bhakti is primarily of two types (1) *sakāma* (having desire for fruit) and (2) *niskama* (desireless). It is the latter type that has been highly extolled and discussed in all devotional works in Assamese. The *Bhakti-viveka* and the *Ghoṣā-ratna* have again classified Bhakti as *phalarūpā* (fruit) and *sādhanarūpā* (means). In the case of the former, Bhakti no longer serves as the means of realising God, it is practised for the sake of its inherent pleasure. At this stage a devotee even rejects with scorn the highest position in heaven.[75]

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[69] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnākar,* verse 961, p. 216; *Bhāgavata* Book X, Bhaṭṭadeva : *Bhakti-viveka* XIV 646.

[70] Mādhavadeva : *Nāmaghoṣā,* verse 597.

[71] Bhaṭṭadeva : *Bhakti-viveka* III/163.

[72] Bhaṭṭadeva : Ibid, XIV/645.

[73] Bhaṭṭadeva : Ibid, III/127; Śaṅkaradeva : *Nimi-Navasidhha-saṁvāda,* verses 211-217, p. 46f.

[74] Śaṅkaradeva : *Nimi-Navasiddha-saṁvāda,* verses 395-398, p. 86.

[75] Bhaṭṭadeva : *Bhakti-viveka,* XI/530, XII/554, XIV/632; Gopal Miśra : *Ghoṣā-ratna.* pp. 126-140.

Niskāma-bhakti has again been classified into several types in the devotional scriptures in Assamese. The *Sātvata-tantra* which is considered one of the authoritative work and which has no less than three Assamese versions written in the seventeenth century, classifies Bhakti into (i) *Bhāgavatī* (ii) *Nirguṇā* and (iii) *Premamayī*. *Bhakti-ratnākara* classifies Bhakti into four types, viz., (i) *Sapremā*, (ii) *Nirguṇā*, (iii) *Antaraṅgā*, (iv) *Uttamā*. *Guru-carita* by Rāmānanda Dvija has discussed four types of Bhakti; they are (i) *Nirguṇā*, (ii) *Bhāgavatī*, (iii) *Antaraṅgā*, (iv) *Kevalā*. Reference to all these types of Bhakti are also found in *Kathā-gurucarita* and some other biographies of the Vaiṣṇava saints. But excepting the characteristics given in *Sātvata-tantra*, no other work mentioned above has given clear and demarcating characteristics of the different types of Bhakti enumerated above and, therefore, we do not get a clear idea of the different types. But *Sātvata-tantra* makes a clear distinction between the three types of Bhakti by defining that knowledge (*jñāna*), activity (*karma*) i.e., services pleasing to God and sports (*līlā*) of God are the basis of *Nirguṇā*, *Bhāgavatī* and *Premamayī* Bhakti respectively. The first is meditative in nature, based as it is on knowledge (*jñāna-pradhānā*), the second is characterised by activity (*karma-pradhānā*), such as, going on a pilgrimage, and worshipping of image, etc., and the third is passionate in nature (*prema-pradhānā*).[76] The main characteristics as found in different works are noted below.

(1) *Nirguṇā*: According to *Sātvata-tantra* it is based on knowledge. Indifference to worldly pursuits and belief in the immanence of God are its main characteristics. *Bhakti-ratnākara* defines it as that type of Bhakti whereby a devotee giving up all kinds of activity revels only in desireless adoration of Kṛṣṇa, and *Guru-carita* by Rāmānanda Dvija says that the mental worship (*mānasa pūjā*) of Kṛṣṇa constitutes the main characteristic of *Nirguṇā*. The common feature of the definitions of the three works is the cessation from outward ceremonial activities and intensification of mental devotion. Śukadeva, son of Vyāsa, is the model devotee of this type of Bhakti.

(2) *Premamayī* or *Sapremā*: *Sātvata-tantra* and *Bhakti-ratnākara* are in accord in regard to this type of Bhakti. It is passionate in nature. Devotees drinking deep in the lake of the divine sports of God, sometimes laugh, sometimes cry and sometimes roll on the ground, and thus completely identify themselves with sports (*līlā*) of the Lord. Milkmaids of Vṛndāvana are the model devotees practising this type of Bhakti.

(3) *Bhāgavatī*: *Sātvata-tantra* and *Guru-carita* have dealt with this type of Bhakti and *Bhakti-ratnākara*, in course of its discussion on *Uttamā-bhakti*, refers to it also. It is defined as that type of Bhakti where the motor-

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[76] Bhāgavata Miśra : *Sātvata-tantra*, chap. IV.

organs (*karmendriya*) and sense organs (*jñānendriya*) naturally operate and take delight in the services of Viṣṇu. It consists of desireless devotional services to the Lord. Setting out on pilgrimage, worshipping of idol or image of the diety, washing or cleaning of shrines of Viṣṇu and such activities pleasing to the Lord mark *Bhāgavatī-bhakti*.

(4) *Antaraṅgā*: *Bhakti-ratnākara* and *Guru-carita* have recorded it, while *Sātvata-tantra* makes no mention of it. It is also referred to in *Kathā-gurucarita*. *Antaraṅgā-bhakti* consists in perceiving the immanence of God in all animate and inanimate objects and devotees, accordingly, not only develop respects for all objects but consider them as their own selves. The *Guru-carita* makes a subtle distinction between *Nirguṇā* and *Antaraṅgā* and says that devotees taking delight in *Anaraṅgā-bhakti* feel the presence of God in everything (Pantheism), while those of *Nirguṇā-bhakti* see the world in God[77] (Panentheism).

(5) *Kevalā*: Kevalā-bhakti means an exclusive and single-minded devotion to God. But it has been defined by Rāmānanda as Bhakti practised and developed through holy association (*sat-saṅga*) under the guidance of a Guru. A devotee adhering to this type of Bhakti regards his Guru as the image of God and services to holy persons as an essential part of devotion. Services rendered to Guru and holy persons are considered services rendered to God. It is called *Kevalā* (exclusive) in the sense that it does not admit any other way than the one pointed out by Guru and practised and developed in the company of holy association. When Bhakti is practised for the sake of Bhakti alone and not for any other sake, and not even for liberation, it is called Uttamā. It is independent of all injunctions of śāstras.

It is evident from the characteristics mentioned above that the classification is not based on any scientific differentiation of the salient features of Bhakti. The classification is made on a superficial basis. For instance, the *guruvāda* and *satsaṅga* which have been considered essential conditions of *Kevalā-bhakti*, are not unnecessary in other types of Bhakti also, though the emphasis on them may be a bit lesser. Similarly, the feeling that God exists everywhere is not peculiar to *Antaraṅgā-bhakti* alone. In fact, it should be equally present in all forms of Bhakti. This much, however, can be said that the classification is done according to the emphasis laid on one or the other of the several elements of Bhakti. The above classification is not actually carried into practise. In practice, the Vaiṣṇavism of Assam presents a blending of the different types of which those of *Supremā* and *Bhāgavatī* predominate.

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[77] Rāmānanda Dvija : *Guru-carita*, p. 122.
"antaryāmīrūpe Hari savāte āchanta
antaraṅgā-bhakti karā lokara āśaya
samaste jagata ito āche Īśvarata
nirguṇa-bhakati karantāra hena mata"

Elements of Bhakti : Types of Bhakti mentioned above can be practised through one or more of the nine ways of devotion (*navadhā-bhakti*). They are (i) *śravana* or the act of listening to the accounts of the form, sports and names of the Lord from the lips of a confirmed devotee, (ii) *kīrtana* or the act of chanting prayers (iii) *smaraṇa* or the act of remembering the form (*rūpa*), sports (*līlā*) and names (*nāma*) of Viṣṇu, (iv) *pada-savana* or the act of serving the feet of the Lord by various devotional ways, (v) *arccana,* or the rite of ceremonial or non-ceremonial worship, (vi) *vandana* or the act of homage to the Lord by salutation and prostration.

The next three elements cannot strictly be called mode or ways of Bhakti, rather they indicate the nature of the devotional relationship between the worshipper and the worshipped, or the attitude with which a devotee looks upon or serves the Lord. (vii) *Dāsya* consists in worshipping or serving the Lord with the attitude of a faithful and self-surrendering servant. (viii) *sakhya* is based on the sense of friendship between the worshipper and the worshipped and lastly, (ix) *ātmanivedana* or the complete self-surrender which consists of the feeling that one's body, mind, senses and the soul are intended for the Bhagavat.

Now, the Assamese Vaiṣṇavas look upon God with the attitude of a faithful and loving servant ; in other words, the relation between the worshipper and the worshipped, as assumed by them, is that of the master and the servant. Taking into account the relation between the Jīva and Īśvara as the creator and the created and limitations under which the jīva operates, they are of opinion that the *dāsya-bhāva* or the attitude of a faithful and loving servant towards his master is the most proper attitude with which the Lord should be served. In the ultimate stage the jīva may partake of the nature of the Lord, but as long as the jīva forms a part of the creation, whether illusory or real, he is preserved and sustained by God. As such, the position of God is that of a master. Therefore, He should be worshipped or adored as the Lord. In fact all the Vaiṣṇava writers of Assam beginning with Śaṅkaradeva have expressed this attitude by describing themselves as the servant of Kṛṣṇa (*Kṛṣṇara kiṅkara*). They have even described themselves in many places as the servant of the servant of Kṛṣṇa.[78]

The school of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism has preferred and adopted *śravana* and *kīrtana* as practical modes (*sādhana*) of their devotional practices. These are said to be the most powerful means of affecting a devotional attitude and not subject to restriction of time, place and person. They are the only efficacious methods which should be universally adopted in the present era of Kali.[79] Importance of *arccana, vandana, padasevana, etc.*, has not been minimised but it is stated that these are more suitable for the ritualistic type of devotion where an image of the deity is present, or when the devotion is of the *sādhyā* type, i.e. when the devotee enjoys the presence of the Lord constantly.

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[78] Śaṅkaradeva : *Nimi-Navasiddha-saṁvāda,* verse 309.

"tomār bhṛtyara bhṛtyara bhṛtyara
tāra bhṛtya bhalo āmi
moka Jagannāth nakarā anāth
neribā Mādhava svāmi."

Śravana is considered to be the root of Bhakti. The act of listening to the description of the form, sports and names of Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu from the lips of holy persons is considered to be the primary and the most important duty of a man striving to proceed on the path of devotion. The following lines from *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* by Mādhavadeva clearly bring out the above view held by Vaiṣṇavas.

"Listen, friends, to the considerate words of mine. Know it for certain that *sravana* is the root of devotion to God. One who listens to *Hari-kathā* from the lips of holy persons, comes to know the real purport of devotion at the end. All doubts are set at rest whoever listens to devotional discourses of a holy man and consequently his passion for the service of God increases. Realising it, hear *Harikathā* from the lips of saints and utter the names of Rāma which will easily beget liberation for you."[80]

Śravana thus creates an interest in *Hari-kathā* which naturally leads one to chant the names and attributes of Kṛṣṇa. This act of chanting the names of God called—*kīrtana* has been classified into four types, viz., (i) recitation of verses in praise of the deity, (ii) muttering of names of the deity, (iii) reading or reciting stories about the deity, (iv) singing of songs. It may again be *vācika* (uttered audibly), *upāṁśu* (muttered in a low voice) and *mānasa* (mental recitation).[81]

According to the Vaiṣṇavite scriptures one who recites, utters and chants the names of Kṛṣṇa derives seven kinds of merit immediately ; (i) his sins are destroyed, (ii) merits accrue, (iii) creates indifference to worldy pleasures, (iv) develops devotion towards Kṛṣṇa, (v) begets knowledge, (vi) destroys Māyā and finally (vii) the difference between the devotee and the Lord is obliterated.[82] Śaṅkaradeva devotes an entire section of his

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[79] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata*, Book I, verse 38.
"yadyapi bhakati navavidha Mādhavar
sravana-kirtana tāte mahā sreṣṭhatar"

[80] Mādhavadeva : *Bhakti-ratnāvalī*, verse 465-67.

[81] Bhaṭṭadeva : *Bhakti-viveka*, chapt. IX ; *Śaraṇa-saṁgraha*, 5/27
Japastu trividhah prokto vacikopāṁsumānasah I
japeṣvetesu viprendrā purvat purvataro varah II

[82] Śaṅkaradeva : *Kīrtana*, section II, p. 15f.

Kīrtana to the glorification and efficacy of reciting or chanting the names of Hari. In fact, the vast Vaiṣṇavite literature, consisting of songs, plays and verses, was composed solely for the purpose of *sravana* and *kīrtana*. Next in importance to *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana* is *smaraṇa* which consists in remembering God's form, sports and names. But the rest *viz, arccana, vandana etc.*, have not been so highly extolled or recommended.

Attainment of Bhakti : Though it has been said that Bhakti is *nirapekṣā* and therefore, does not require any help or guide for its practice or attainment, yet the necessity of creating a proper devotional atmosphere has been specially recommended. In spite of the existence of a devotional propensity in a man, worldly pleasures and attractions may lead him astray and devotional tendency may not develop with sufficient intensity unless properly trained and guided. As a sure evoker of devotional passion, contacts with saints and guidance of a Guru have been prescribed. The association of saints provides an atmosphere surcharged with spirituality and devotion. The Vaiṣṇava writers have devoted enough space to eulogise the efficacy of *sat-saṅga*. Even a moment spent in the association of devotees is worth more than a long stay in heaven. "Devas and tīrthas can purify after a long time, whereas the very sight of a saint purges one of all sin."[83] It is needless to repeat here separately the qualities of a true saint or devotee enumerated in different devotional treatises. The principal common qualities are, that a bhakta must conquer his gross nature and acquire an equipoise of mind, the harmony of which will not be easily disturbed. He is not swayed in any way by worldly desires. He has risen above the bickerings of *mine* and *thine* : praise and slander are one to him. He is not overjoyed at one and displeased at the other. Above all, he is deeply attached to Kṛṣṇa.[84]

But all these qualities may not be equally present in all types of devotees. Therefore, devotees have been classified into three types, viz. (1) *uttama* (bst), (2) *madhyama* (middling), (3) *prākṛita* (ordinary). The best devotee possesses the above qualities to a maximum degree, the ordinary devotee in a minimum degree. In between the two stands the middling. According to *Bhakti-ratnākara* and *Sātvata-tantra*, the best devotees are those who perceive all beings as their own selves and as manifestations of God. The second type of devotees are those who have love for God, friendship for his devotees, mercy for the ignorant and indifference in reference to enemies. The third type of devotees are those who worship the image of God with devotion but have no special feeling for the devotees of God and other persons.[85] But an ordinary devotee can rise gradually to the height of the *uttama-bhakta* with the help of holy association and Guru.

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[83] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnākara*, verses 78-79, Bhaṭṭadeva : *Bhakti-viveka*, chapt. VI/416-417.

[84] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnākara*, chap. XVII, verses 558-98.

But Bhakti does not only need to be awakened and sharpened, it must at the same time be sustained and trained. An aspirant may constantly be in touch with holy association and that will no doubt help him considerably in understanding the nature of Bhakti, but he must permanently attach himself to one principal saint, who will be his philosopher and guide, or in other words, he will act as the Guru. The life of Bhakti without a spiritual guide is often compared to a boat plying in the ocean without a helmsman (*karṇadhāra*). An aspirant should carefully select his Guru, otherwise he may fall into the trap of a hypocrite. The Guru must possess all the qualities of a saintly devotee mentioned above, and in addition be able to evoke a sense of faith and confidence in the mind of the novice, so that the novice may be able to follow the path indicated by him without any diffidence. He must be able to interpret and explain properly. Once the proper Guru is selected, the disciple must pay full allegiance to him and he is to offer all that is his at the feet of the Guru and serve him with his body and mind.[86] From the novice's point of view the Guru is as great as the Lord Himself, for, it is by the grace of the Guru that the disciple comes to know and realise the Lord.[87] Thus, by the guidance of the Guru and the help derived from the holy-association Bhakti can be easily attained. The Guru, the holy-association (*sat-saṅga*), the names (*nāma*) of the Lord and God Himself (*deva*), these constitute the four fundamental elements (*cāri-vastu*) of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism. But these four elements are organically connected and are nothing but four aspects of the same composite doctrine.

Sin against Bhakti : The infringement of a certain set of rules and regulations prescribed for devotees, or indulgence in taboos which are considered impediments on the path of devotion is regarded as a sin (*aparādha*) against Bhakti. The sin or transgression against Bhakti is generally of four kinds, viz., against (i) Nāma, (ii) Deva, (iii) Guru and (iv) Bhakta. In dealing with each of the above fundamentals, devotees are required to observe certain rules and to abstain from doing certain prohibited deeds. If anybody unconsciously commits any of the prohibited actions, he should go through a process of expiation prescribed in sastras according to the nature of the action.

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[85] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, verses 556-638, pp. 129-143 ; & Bhāgavata Miśra : *Sātvata-tantra*, p. 38ff.

[86] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnākara*, verses 10-13 ;

[87] Mādhavadeva : *Nāmaghoṣā*, verse 680.

Hari yena āti kṛpāmaya, bhakta gurujano sehinaya 1
duyojana eka mātra śarirata bhinna ll

The details of different varieties of sin enumerated in *Sātvata-tantra* and *Kīrtana* are noted below.

(1) *Sin against Nāma:* Ten varieties of sin have been enumerated in *Kīrtana.* They are : (i) speaking ill of devotees and of (ii) the Vedas, (iii) discrimination between Hari and Hara, (iv) doubting the value and efficacy of *nāma,* (v) assignment of equal status to other dharmas with *nāma,* (vi) belittling *nāma,* (vii) favouring one with *nāma* who has no faith and respect for it, (viii) showing arrogance and pride in bestowing *nāma* to seekers, (ix) neglecting the words of the spiritual guide, (x) showing apathy and negligence while others sing or utter *nāma.* Sins for committing the above transgressions can be expiated by remembering or muttering the sacred names for hundred times.[88]

(II) *Sin against Deva:* It is of thirtytwo kinds and almost all of them are connected with the worship of image of the deity. They are (i) to touch or worship the image of Kṛṣṇa without taking bath, (ii) to touch or worship the image within the period of impurity (*aśauca*), (iii) entering into the shrine in an impure condition and (iv) sipping *pādodaka* in an impure state (v) to worship without playing suitable musical instrument such as cymbal, gong or bell, (vi) to worship the deity sitting oneself on a high stool or a seat, (vii) to offer sandle paste to the deity in the month of Pauṣa (November-December), (viii) to refrain from offering sandle-paste in summer, (ix) to show one's back to the deity while worshipping, (x) to move about in the front of the image, (xi) to fan the image in the winter season, (xii) to place the articles to be used in worship on the ground, (xiii) to cook and (xiv) to eat meal within the shrine, (xv) to consider the articles offered to the deity as of no value, (xvi) to give equal status to other deities with Kṛṣṇa, (xvii) to worship Kṛṣṇa after having worshipped other gods i.e., to give priority to other deities, (xviii) to consider image of the deity as a mere log of wood or a lump of clay, (xix) to step into the shrine by raising the left foot first, (xx) to worship with wet or decayed flowers, (xxii) to worship image of the deity without placing it on an appropriate seat, (xxiii) to enter into a shrine or move about within it riding on a horse back or a litter, (xxiv) to hold anything with teeth or chew it within the shrine, (xxv) to cut joke or make a fun within the shrine, (xxvi) to speak ill of the prayer or worship of the deity, (xxvii) to wash impure things within the shrine, (xxviii) to enter into the shrine after touching a woman during her monthly course, (xxix) to insult a devotee or a saint within the shrine, (xxx) to consider the salagrama form of Viṣṇu as a mere stone, (xxxi) to worship image of the deity without scent or incense, (xxxii) to desist from performing *homa* to the adorable deity.

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[88] Śaṅkaradeva : *Kīrtana,* section II, verses 49-72 ; Bhāgavata Misra : *Sātvata-tantra,* verses 253-54, p. 58.

If any devotee unconsciously commits any of the above offences he should go round the image of the deity a hundred times and finally prostrate himself before the image asking forgiveness.[89]

(III) *Sin against Guru :* Five kinds of sin against the Guru have been recorded. (ii) He should not indulge himself in speaking ill of the Guru : it is a sin to do so. (ii) He should not listen to any disparaging remark against the Guru. (iii) He should not indulge himself in speaking ill of the Guru : if he does so it is considered a sin. (iv) To consider the Guru as an ordinary person is a sin. (v) A disciple should not transgress upon or violate the command of the Guru.

A disciple committing any of the above should try to expiate himself by serving the Guru and saints with sincere repentance for his misdeed.[90]

(IV) *Sin against Bhakta :* Sin against devotee is considered to be of more serious nature than any of the above three types of sin. Sin against devotee has been classified into three kinds, viz., (i) to grab or forcibly appropriate belongings of a devotee, (ii) to abuse or insult an *uttama-bhakta,* (iii) to assault an ordinary (*sāmanya*) devotee.

No remedy or expiation has been suggested. But a person can redeem himself by propitiating the person he had wronged. If by serving the devotee he had wronged he can obtain forgiveness, he is absolved from the sin.[91]

In the case of sub-sects which do not practise or look with favour the practice of image worship, various sins enumerated in the second category are not applicable. Those are mainly connected with image worship.

(C) *ETHICAL*

Ethical : The ethical ideal is determined in accordance with what is taken as the highest good of the human existence. Of the four fundamental ideals of the human existence, the fourth ideal, viz., liberation from the bondage of the world, is considered to be the highest, and one should so conduct oneself in this world, as would enable one to attain that ideal. Now, acccording to the Vaiṣṇavites, God is the embodiment of perfection and liberation is dependent on the attainment of the knowledge of God. Assamese Vaiṣṇavites have advocated that the highest religion is the religion of loving devotion to Kṛṣṇa and therefore the highest good (*parā-gati*) can be attained by surrendering oneself at the feet of the Lord and by leading the life of a true Vaiṣṇava. The grace of God can be had only by devotion and self-surrender which ultimately begets knowledge. In the second Book of the *Bhāgavata* Śaṅkaradeva writes : "There is no *dharma* save and except the service of Kṛṣṇa ; devotion to Kṛṣṇa alone begets knowledge. Without His grace nothing can be achieved, even Brahmā, the creator could achieve self-realisation or knowledge by the grace of Kṛṣṇa. That individual effort bereft of God's grace is of no avail is best illustrated in the case of Brahmā the creator, who having born of the naval of Nārāyaṇa tried to probe into the mystery of his origin by delving deep into the cosmic body of the Lord, but had to come out ultimately being baffled in his attempt. He tried his best to have the knowledge of God and of his own self but failed. At long last, realising the utter futility of such an attempt he resorted to devotional meditaion lasting for a thousand years. God being pleased with his devotion endowed him with divine vision which not only enabled him to see the beatific form of the Lord but also helped him to realise the true knowledge of God.[92] Mādhavadeva similarly stresses the necessity of divine grace in his *Nāma-ghoṣā* where he states that a devotee of Bhagavat achieves self-realisation or knowledge (*ātma-bodha*) by the grace of Mādhava only.[93] But the belief in the theory of grace has neither encourageed them to postulate that individual effort for the attainment of the highest good as unnecessary, nor the indiscriminate showering of mercy by God on all alike without any consideration of good or bad deeds. In *Bhakti-ratnākara,* it is stated that God favours those who practise devotion in the association of devotees. Indifference to worldly pleasures and knowledge of God then comes to them, which in turn begets liberation. But until and unless God favours them with His grace they cannot expect to attain knowledge.[94] Till this stage is reached, a man should perform such duties as are not in conflict with the path of devotion.

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[89] Bhāgavata Miśra : *Sātvata-tantra,* verses 264-69, pp. 60-61.

[90] Bhāgavata Miśra : Ibid, p. 65 ; T. N. Goswami : *Bhakti-tattvadarpan,* pp. 126-27.

[91] Bhāgavata Miśra : *Sātvata-tantra,* p. 68 ; T. N. Goswami : *Bhakti-tattva-darpaṇa,* p. 127.

In Book X of the *Bhāgavata,* Śaṅkaradeva writes : "Creatures take their birth and are subjected to pleasure, pain, affliction and fears owing to karma. On the other hand man can not avoid karma. Life cannot be one of inaction ; it may either be of good or bad action. People enjoy or suffer as inevitable consequences of their deeds."[95] The above passage and many other similar passages bring out prominently their belief in the well-known doctrine of karma.

Of the three types of karma, viz., *prārabdha, ārabdha* and *anārabdha,* the consequences of the first type of action is inevitable. But people can destroy the impressions of the other two types of karmas by their conducts in this life. With the attainment of knowledge the seeds of consequences of *ārabdha* and *anārabdha* karmas are destroyed. The Vaiṣṇavite writings have uniformly asserted that by absolute self-surrender to God and by performing all actions in the name of God one can easily overcome the consequences of *ārabdha* and *anārabdha* karmas. Any action that is not done in the name of God or dedicated to Him, binds the doer to the fetters of the world. Even religious actions done with the selfish motive of gaining worldly pleasures or even heaven are causes of re-birth and death and hence they should be avoided.[96]

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[92] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata,* Book II.
[93] *Mādhavadeva* : *Nāmaghoṣā,* Verse. 617, p. 126.
[94] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnākara,* verses 1040-42, p. 231.
[95] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata,* Book X, verses 1006-1007, p.

But the mood of complete detachment (*vairāgya*) or indifference to worldly pursuits which is considered an indispensable factor of liberation does not come so easily. It can be acquired slowly but steadily by devotees of Kṛṣṇa through a gradual process of detachment. The last stage of *vairāgya* is reached when both mind and body forsake their attachment to worldly pleasures and pursuits. This last stage is the ideal one according to ethico-religious teachings of Vaiṣṇavas.[97] When this ideal stage of devotion is reached, the grace of God automatically comes to a devotee and consequently he is released from the bondage of the world. In the final stage, ordinary ethical laws of good and bad conduct cease to operate on him. But till the final and ideal stage is reached, a devotee should scrupulously observe prescriptions and injunctions of the *sāstras*. Defiance or transgression of those sastric codes is *adharma* or sin. This gradual process of spiritual elevation towards the attainment of the ideal Bhakti, has been termed as *Pippalāyana-bhakti* in *Kathā-guru-carita,* because it was advocated by Pippalāyana, one of the nine siddhas who gave devotional instructions to king Nimi.[98]

The belief in the doctrine of karma did not seem to have encouraged the Vaiṣṇavites to have a thoughtless fatalistic outlook on life—an outlook that chills all initiative and taste for life. In this connection an interesting incident from the life of Śaṅkaradeva narrated in *Kathā-gurucarita* may be mentioned.

One day, while Mādhavadeva and some of his colleagues were proceeding to a village, they came across a rogue buffalo notorious for ferocity. On seeing the animal the colleagues of Mādhavadeva moved off. But Mādhavadeva, believing in the inexorable decree of fate, did not move away. He justified his action by saying : "If I am fated to die today as a result of the atack of this animal, nobody can save me". Fortunately the animal did not attack him. On returning from the village, the friends related the incident to Śaṅkaradeva. The latter is stated to have remarked : "Do you know, Mādhava, that a lamp may go out in spite of oil and wick being present if proper precaution is not taken ? Your action practically amounts to an attempt to commit suicide. This attitude on your part towards life will encourage others to be reckless of their life." So saying he advised Mādhavadeva not to trifle with life or take a fatalistic view of life.[99]

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[96] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhakti-ratnākara,* verses 960-62, p. 216.
[97] Śaṅkaradeva : Ibid, verses 1007-1011, p. 225.
[98] U. C. Lekhāru (edited) : *Kathā-gurucarita,* p. 562.

In fact, in innumerable passages the human life has been extolled as of rare value, for, it affords ample opportunities of serving God by devotional acts and practices. It has been dogmatically repeated that even the deities of heaven wish to be born as human beings, so that they would be able to taste the pleasures of serving God through loving devotion. Life is worth-living if it can be employed in the service of God and humanity.

Moral virtues : If appears from the writings of Vaiṣṇavite poets that that ethical and devotional teachings are inseparably connected. It follows, therefore, that wherever there is a true religious spirit, i.e., sincere devotion to the Lord, there cannot but exist all moral qualities and excellences. The good man and the true devotee are, therefore, the same. In the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (V/18/12) it is stated that all good qualities exist in a harmonious way in him who is fervently devoted to God and none is to be found in one who is not devoted, for, the latter's mind is ever directed to transient worldly objects. The recognised ethical or moral virtues have been incorporated as qualities of a true Vaiṣṇava. The universally accepted conducts of right living and praiseworthy virtues have been extolled, while vices have been deprecated. These moral qualities may be enumerated as truthfulness, indifference to worldly pleasures, kindness, hospitality, temperance, contentment, patience, purity of heart, humility, control over passions etc. But non-violence or mercy towards all creatures have been recognised as the virtue par excellence.

Non-violence, so highly commended, has not placed any bar on taking fish or meat by the Vaiṣṇavas of Assam. But the killing of animal for the sake of meat was never encouraged. An incident narrated in the *Kathā-gurucarita* may not be out of place in this connection.

Once the disciples of Mādhavadeva killed some fish in a near-about pond. On coming to know this Mādhavadeva demanded an explanation for indulging themselves in the act of killing animals. They replied that fishes caught by them would have died a few hours later as the water of the pond was fast drying up. Mādhavadeva thereupon asked them ; "Would you kill a Brahmin if you know that he has only a few hours to live and by killing him you will relieve him of his death-agony" ?[100] There are many other examples of stern actions taken by the Vaiṣṇava reformers against moral lapses on the part of their disciples, as well as commendations for virtuous actions done by them. Good conduct and moral excellence is considered an essential element of Vaiṣṇava ethics.

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[99] U. C. Lekhāru (edited) : Ibid, p. 107.
[100] U. C. Lekhāru (edited) : Ibid, p. 457.

(D) *SOCIAL*

Though devotional realisation is individualistic in nature, yet it has a social bearing also. Though it implies a passion for the beyond and indifference to worldly pleasures and attractions, yet it has not forgotten to rescue creatures steeped in the misery of worldliness. It is considered a duty of a Vaiṣṇava to uplift the miserable lying in the worldly swamps below. Also "The service of humanity is the service of God" has been the motto of Vaiṣṇava reformers. With this view Śaṅkaradeva and his followers advised their disciples not to hate anybody however lowly placed he might be. Without enquiring into the caste or creed a Vaiṣṇava should, according to them, keep an equal eye on a Brahmin or a Caṇḍāla. Śaṅkaradeva translated this principle into action by bringing to his fold all sorts of people hailing from different strata of society. Perhaps owing to this levelling influence of their teachings in the sphere of religion the problem of untouchability in Assam has never been very acute. It should not be supposed that the Vaiṣṇava reformers headed by Śaṅkaradeva were out to reform the entire social structure of the Hindus. Their sole interest was religion, and the social reform wrought by them was only a by-product of the Bhakti movement. The detailed social consequences of the new faith and movement will be dealt with while assessing the social and cultural contribution of the satra institution.

Attitude towards castes: Śaṅkaradeva preached equality in the spiritual domain. He not only admitted but preached that everybody is equal in the eye of God and therefore, everybody has equal right to worship. The path of spiritual realisation cannot be the exclusive right of a socially privileged few, rather it should be the duty of those socially privileged to bring their brethern of the lower stratum to the path of spiritual realisation. According to them a caṇḍāla, if he is a devotee, is superior to a Brahmin without devotion. "A Caṇḍdāla who remembers Hari heart and soul is much superior to a Brahmin observing various religious vows,"[101]—so says Śaṅkaradeva. Again he says in another passage : "That Caṇḍāla is considered superior on whose lips the names of Hari constantly abide. As soon as be utters the name of Hari, he earns the merit of performing many sacrifices. He is a real *kulina* (i.e., of good or high origin) and he knows the Vedas whose lips utter the name of Hari. He earns the merit of ablution in all holy places and of performing various sacrifices, meditation and deeds of gift."[102] True to this ideal Śaṅkaradeva enlisted followers from all sections of people including Mahmmedans. True to that ideal the religious headship was not kept confined to a particular class. Even today, the headship of many a satra is held by non-Brahmin communities.

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[101] Śaṅkaradeva : *Bhāgavata*, Book X, verses 12622-23.

But admitting all this, Śaṅkaradeva appears to have made a distinction between religious and social spheres. The broadening of religious privileges was not taken necessarily to mean enlargement of social rights. In some medieval Vaiṣṇavite sects, viz., those of Kabir, Nanak and Dādu an open challenge to the caste system is one of the important features. This is in no way a strong point of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism. There is no evidence to show that Śaṅkaradeva and his followers tried to do away or interfere with caste regulation. His sole concern was to see that social distinction places no unnecessary restriction upon one's inherent right to spiritual development. Neither is there any evidence to show that he encouraged inter-dining. An incident narrated in the *Dihiṅg Satrar Buranjī* may be mentioned to illustrate their attitude towards the caste system.

Gopāladeva Ātā, founder of the Kāla Śaṁhati sect had, amongst others, one Brahmin disciple Bhavānanda. The latter cast off his sacred thread saying; "As I have received the golden thread of Bhakti, there is no use of my carrying this cotton thread". On coming to know of this, Gopāla Ātā expelled him from his satra for transgressing the traditional caste rules.[103] On the whole, it may be said of Śaṅkaradeva and his followers that they wanted religious freedom and fellowship rather than a social overhaul.

Attitude towards other sects: Sectarianism and intolerance of the Vaiṣṇavas and the Vaiṣṇava writers offer a strange contrast to their ideal of humility and love. The Vaiṣṇava writers pronounced a universal anathema against all who did not belong to their sect. They sought to prove the superiority of their creed by quoting verses gleaned from different Vaiṣṇava scriptures. Pursuit of other creeds is like sucking milkless teat of a cow or even worse. The *tārkikas* or dialecticians were the pet aversions of the Vaiṣṇavas and a dialectician is often compared to a male tiger. All relations with non-vaiṣṇavas are strictly forbidden and acceptance of *mantra* from a non-Vaiṣṇava preceptor has been described as being one of the shortest route to hell. Even Śaṅkaradeva strictly forbids his followers in this way. "Do not bow down or salute any other deity than Kṛṣṇa ; do not even enter a shrine dedicated to other deities and never partake of things offered to them".

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[102] Śaṅkaradeva : *Kīrtana,* section, III, verses 112-113 ; p. 25

[103] Dutiram Hāzarika : *Dihing Satrar Buranjī,* Transcript No. 136, D.H.A.S., Gauhati.

But the uncompromising attitude need not blind us to the fact that in actual practice toleration was not unknown to the Vaiṣṇavas. Except in matters of religious observances, complete harmony between different sects of Hinduism has been in prevalence since early times.

Attitude towards woman : It has been a custom with spiritual seekers of all times to condemn woman and wealth with a view to evoking detachment. Attachment towards the world is evoked, sustained and increased by woman ; as such close attachment to her should be avoided if possible. Assamese Vaiṣṇavas also have not spoken favourably of woman and in several passages have decried the evil influence of woman and wealth, which a devotee should try to avoid.[104] No doubt they must have decried the sex aspect of woman which keeps man in a state of intoxication by enveloping his better senses. In practice, they seem to have shown no ill-will against woman as an individual, and have shown commendable generosity not only by initiating women to the devotional cult, but by acknowledging one lady or two as religious heads. The cases of Śaṅkaradeva's grand daughter-in-law, Kanakalatā, and Harideva's daughter Bhuyaneśwarī, who were recognised as religious heads of their respective sub-sects, deserve special mention. The biographies of Śaṅkaradeva, however, mention that he declined to ordain women, kings and typical Brahmins (Brahmins steeped in ritualistic practices) on the ground that they would not be able to pay undivided attention to Bhakti. Even if we take this statement to be a correct one, it was not observed by his followers in latter times. The practice of initiating or ordaining women come to be prevalent in three sub-sects of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism.

But in spite of the right to religious ordination granted to womenfolk, they have not been enjoying the same religious privilege as has been enjoyed by their counterpart. In some of the important satras they are still denied the right of entering into the central prayer hall. The case of Kanakalatā and Bhuvaneśwarī, noted above, serving as the head of their respective sub-sects appears to be an exception, for the latter history of Assam Vaiṣṇavism does not present a single case where a woman was allowed to ordain disciple and manage a satra. Liberalism which marked the initial stage of the history Vaiṣṇavism in Assam, was later on replaced by conservatism so far as its attitude towards womenfolk was concerned.

Closely connected with the question of the attitude towards woman is the problem of marriage and celibacy. Renunciation of the world for the sake of religion is nowhere extolled by Śaṅkaradeva, rather there are instances narrated in his biographies where he is said to have favoured the life of a householder. Himself leading an ideal householder's life with wife and children, he did not think marriage to be a drag upon the path of devotion. Most of his principal colleagues with the singular exception of Mādhavadeva were married persons. Śaṅkaradeva is said to have even insisted upon the desirability of marriage by Mādhavadeva as a safeguard to the allurement of woman and wealth.[105] Though Mādhavadeva declined to accept the suggestion of his Guru by a counter argument with proper humility behoving a disciple, yet the incident clearly indicates the attiude of Śaṅkaradeva towards the problem of marriage and celibacy. He is, however, said to have remarked on a different occasion that for persons of saintly character with natural indifference to worldly attractions, celibacy could be recommended.[106]

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[104] Śaṅkaradeva : *Kīrtana,* section VIII, Verse 529. p. 131.

Mādhavadeva who was a life-long celibate did not recommend celibacy for one and all. From a careful perusal of the medieval biographies, one is tempted to believe that in the earlier part of his career he was in favour of celibacy and aloofness ; but a few cases of lapses on the part of his celibate disciples and worldly tendencies of a few others, perhaps induced him to change his opinion. *Kathā-gurucarita* contains several instances of such worldliness on the part of some celibate devotees. Mādhavadeva, therefore, on the eve of his death advised his disciples not to take him as their model and adopt celibacy. He is said to have remarked, "Nobody amongst you should renounce the word (*gṛhāśrama*), if you seriously desire to render bhakti to Hari. Do not dare to adopt celibacy taking me as your model."[107] But in spite of this negative recommendation celibacy came to stay and became a customary practice in satras of the monastic type. Many of the later proselytisers were also celibates. The ideal set by them and the advantages inherent in celibacy over the married life helped celibacy to have a firm footing in Assamese Vaiṣṇavism, though the number of Vaiṣṇavas adhering to this mode of life is far fewer than those married.

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[105] Daityāri Ṭhākur : *Śaṅkaradeva-Madhavadeva-carita* verses 488-89. p. 267.

[106] U. C. Lekharu (edited) : *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 130.

[107] Daityāri Ṭhākur : *Śaṅkaradeva-Madhavadeva-carita*, p. 242.
U. C. Lekhāru : *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 304.

CHAPTER IV

HISTORY OF SUB-SECTS AND EXPANSION OF THE SATRA

Sub-sects of Damodaradeva and Harideva: In the second chapter, reference has been made to the rift that took place during the times of Mādhavadeva. The causes that led Dāmodara to secede from the orthodox Mahāpuruṣīyā cult has also been noted in that chapter. Harideva another Brahmin follower of Śaṅkaradeva is also supposed to have started a new sect as distinct from that of Śaṅkaradeva. All *carita-puthis* of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva contain the incident of Dāmodaradeva's act of seceding away from the main body, but nowhere is there any reference to Harideva starting a distinct sect or a sub-sect. Any way, it is clear and beyond doubt that the sub-sect of Dāmodaradeva came into existence in times of Mādhavadeva and that took place immediately after the death of Śaṅkaradeva. But Haridevī sect does not seem to be so old, as no reference to its growth is found in any of the earlier biographies. The only biography which tries to establish this sect as an independent one is *Harideva-carita* written by Dhaneswar and Bāṇeswara Dvija. It appear to be a later work.[1]

Most probably this sub-sect began to claim its independence after the formation of the Dāmodarī sub-sect and the idea of proclaiming itself a separate sect must have been supplied by the action of Dāmodara and his followers. A Brahminical swing-back to orthodoxy, no doubt, impelled Dāmodaradeva and the followers of Harideva too, to disown their connection with the original sect of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. Most probably, Harideva himself did not disown his relationship with Śaṅkaradeva, for, he died in the same year in which the latter died and the early biographies have not mentioned any such attempt on his part as that of Dāmodaradeva. Under the circumstances, it woud be more reasonable to suppose that the idea of claiming indepence for his sect must have occurred later than the formation of the Dāmodarī sub-sect. But in spite of their contention it cannot be called an independent sect, in-as-much as religious tenets and observances of their *saṁpradāya* is almost identical with the Śaṅkarite sect and is therefore undoubtedly connected with it.

Division in Mahāpuruṣīyā order: Besides the above two seceding sub-sects, there are three more sub-sects which originated after the death of Mādhavadeva within the main body of the order. The process of their growth may be compared to the course of a river which divided itself into several channels, without completely losing its original entity. The different channels, no doubt, derived the main strength from the original river, but nevertheless, they received a considerable supply of water on their way downwards from other sources also. Such a phenomenon also happened in the case of the Mahāpuruṣīyā cult after Mādhavadeva. We have already stated in the concluding portion of the second chapter that Mādhavadeva did not nominate any body to succeed him as the supreme religious head. There was none among his principal disciples who could command unflinching allegiance from all sections of devotees. Dāmodaradeva seceded during the life time of Mādhavadeva. Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākur, the friend and colleague of Mādhavadeva was then too old to shoulder the responsibility of weilding together the different sections of devotees. Naturally, therefore, the disciples found themselves in three sections under the leadership of Gopāla Ātā, Puruṣottama Ṭhākur and Mathurādāsa respectively.

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[1] *Harideva-carita,* edited and published by Karuna Kanta Barua, B. S. 1332.

Gopāla Ātā and Mathurādāsa *alias* Buḍhā Ātā, are two of the important *dharmāchāryas* appointed by Mādhavadeva. Gopala Ātā resided at Bhawānipur, a few miles from Barpetā and Mathurādāsa at the Barpetā satra. Both of them claimed to be the real successor of Mādhavadeva and they not only rallied around them their own disciples but tried to win over other groups to their respective sides. To add to the list, Puruṣottama Ṭhākur, the eldest grandson of Śaṅkaradeva stood as the third claimant for the leadership. Puruṣottama Ṭhākur claimed that he being the direct descendant of the originator of the sect should naturally be acknowledged as the leader of the sect. Mathurādāsa aspired to the leadership on the strength of his superiorship of the Barpetā satra, established and organised by Mādhavadeva. According to *Gopāla Ātā-carita* Mādhava's real successor to the pontifical position was Gopāla Ātā. Mādhavadeva is said to have expressed his preference for Gopāla Ātā before his faithful attendant Śrīrāma Ātā.[2]

Thus, with the formation of three rival groups, germs of difference began to develop. Accounts of conflict even on minor points are found in *carita-puthis* of their respective sub-sect. *Ṭhākur Ātā-carita* describes a quarrel between Mathurādāsa (Buḍhā Ātā) and Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākur on the question of the Guruship. Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākur considered Śaṅkaradeva as the Guru of the sect, whereas Mathurādāsa contended that Mādhavadeva was the real Guru of the sect and considered Śaṅkaradeva to be an incarnation.[3] Similarly, Puruṣottama did not acknowledge Mādhavadeva as the successor of Śaṅkaradeva and when Mathurādāsa and Gopāla Ātā did not approve of this attitude of Puruṣottama Ṭhākur, the latter is said to have forbidden the use of *Kīrtana* and *Daśama*, composed by his grandfather, by the groups headed by Mathurādāsa and Gopāla Ātā. Not only that, he even composed a new set of devotional verses known as *Na-ghoṣā* to replace those of *Nāmaghoṣā* by Mādhavadeva. Thus the gulf of difference gradually widened and ultimately resulted in the formation of three sub-sects within the Mahapuruṣīyā section. In fundamental doctrines and practices there is no difference amongst them ; difference could be noticed only in the case of minor practices and in the degrees of emphasis laid on any of the four fundamental principles, viz, *Nāma, Deva, Guru* and *Bhakta.*

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[2] T. N. Goswami (edited) : *Gopāla Ātā-carita*, pp. 20, 56.

These three sub-sects together with the two seceding sub-sects are popularly known as *saṁhati* or *sampradā*. The sub-sects organised by Dāmodaradeva and Harideva are considered as one *saṁhati* and it is called Brahma Saṁhati. The sub-sects founded by Gopāla Ātā and Puruṣottama Ṭhākur are known as Kāla and Puruṣa Saṁhatis respectively. The sub-sect organised by Mathurādāsa and Padma Ātā is called Nikā Saṁhati.

Saṁhati : The term *saṁhati* is a synonym of the term *saṅgha* which means an association. The term is also used as *saṅghaṭi* (Sk. *saṅghaṭṭana* joining, cohesion). The term has been in vogue at least from the eighteenth century, if not earlier, for, *Kathā-gurucarita* uses the terms to mean the above sub-sects. *Santa-sampradā* by Govindadāsa written during the reign of king Rudra Siṁha refers to the Saṁhatis. *Ācārya-saṁhati*, a Sanskrit work written in the garb of of prophesy speaks of the four Saṁhatis. *Kathā-guru-carita* and *Santa-saṁpradā* are definitely known to be the works of the eighteenth century. But the date of *Ācārya-saṁhati* cannot be ascertained definitely. It appears to be a work of the same period.

Vaiṣṇavas of orthodox type explain the terms, viz., *Puruṣa, Nikā, Kāla* and *Brahma* in a fantastic or mythological way without any rational basis. According to them the Brahma Saṁhati is so called because it originated from Brahmā, the creator. The Purusa Saṁhati derived its name from Puruṣa-Nārāyaṇa who is supposed to be its first initiator. In this way, they try to explain the designations attributed to different sub-sects[5] without any logical basis. The real significance of these terms may be rationally interpreted in the following way.

Because of the predominance of Brahminical elements, the sub-sects of Dāmodaradeva and Harideva have been known as Brahma Saṁhati.

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[3] *Ṭhākur Ātā-carita*, p. 241 ; *Gopāla Ātā-carita*, p. 115.

[4] *Kathā-gurucarita*, pp. 521, 618 ;

[5] T. N. Goswami : *Bhaktitattva-darpaṇa*, p. 16ff.

The origin of this term has nothing to do with Brahma Sampradāya of Mādhvācārya. Brahminical rites and rituals flourish side by side with devotional rites and practices in this Saṁhati.

As regards the term Puruṣa Saṁhati, two explanations are generally suggested. According to one, the Puruṣa Saṁhati derives its name from term *Mahāpuruṣa,* the honorific title applied to Śaṅkaradeva, who is supposed to be the initiator of this sub-sect. But this explanation seems to be a far-fetched one in-as-much-as this sub-sect had no existence at all during the times of Śaṅkaradeva. The second explanation seems to be a correct one, according to which the sub-sect is so called because it was founded by Puruṣottama Ṭhākur the eldest grandson of Śaṅkaradeva. The sub-sect, therefore, derived its name from the name of its founder Puruṣottama Ṭhākur. The sub-sect lays special emphasis on Śaṅkaradeva as the only Guru of the Mahāpuruṣīyā sect and gives more importance to *nāma* element of the four fundamental things (*vastu*).

The third sub-sect viz., Kāla Saṁhati owes its origin to Gopāla Ātā. There are more than one interpretations of the term *Kāla* attributed to this sub-sect. One explanation is that the followers of the other three sub-sects sarcastically called it Kāla or Kāl (extreme, black, dangerous) keeping in view the left-handed esoteric observances supposed to be prevalent in this sub-sect. In this connection we may compare this nomenclature with those of some well-known religious sects viz. Kālamukha sect or Kālacakrayāna, which are known to have prescribed extreme esoteric practices and despicable observances. But the view that the sub-sect preached extreme and dangerous views transgressing the fundamental doctrines of Vaiṣṇavism cannot stand on a closer scrutiny. A negligible minority, mostly of backward and tribal classes, affiliated loosely to this sub-sect practise esoteric observances. Neither Gopāla Ātā, nor any of his principal followers are known to have preached extreme or dangerous views or practised left-handed esoteric observances. Therefore, the other explanation that the sub-sect owes its epithet to the name of the locality, Kālajhār from which Gopāla Ātā preached his doctrine and directed the activities of his agents appears to be a correct one. Kalājhār was the head-quarters of Gopāla Ātā for several years till his death. The sub-sect lays special emphasis on the doctrine of *guruvāda.* The Guru occupies as exalted a position as that of God.

The fourth sub-sect viz., Nikā Saṁhati seems to have taken a definite shape after the formation of the sub-sects noticed above. The origin of this sub-sect is erroneously ascribed to Mādhavadeva though he had nothing to do with its formation. The founders of this sub-sect are Mathurādāsa Ātā and Padma Ātā *alias* Badalā Ātā, two of the most faithful

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[6] S. C. Goswami : *Introducing Assam Vaisnavism,* p. 18.

and prominent disciples of Mādhavadeva. Having seen certain deviations and laxity amongs the followers of other sub-sects, they are said to have organised this branch in strict conformity with the rules and regulations prescribed by Mādhavadeva and hence this purified sub-sect came to be known as the Nikā (pure, clean) Saṁhati.[7]

(1) *THE BRAHMA SAMHATI*

The Brahma Saṁhati includes the sub-sects of Dāmodaradeva and Harideva. The former is more widespread and influential, while the latter's activity is mainly confined to the present district of Kāmarūpa. As the influence of the sub-sect of Dāmodaradevā is far deeper and far-reaching, the consideration of this sub-sect has been taken up first.

1(A) *The sub-sect of Dāmodaradeva*

Date of Dāmodaradeva : Next to Śaṅkaradeva, the outstanding figures who by their towering personality, religious zeal and organising capacity made Vaiṣṇavism a dominant cult in Assam, are Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva. According to the traditional account prevalent amongst the followers of his sub-sect, Dāmodaradeva was born in the year 1488 A.D. and died in 1598, at the ripe old age of one hundred and ten years.[8] But this traditional account of the date of his birth or death does not tally with the historical references found in his principal biographies. It should be borne in mind in this connection, that his two earliest biographies namely '*Gurulīlā*' by Rāmarāya Dvija and *Dāmodara-carita* by Nīlakaṇṭha Dāsa, have made no mention of the year of his birth or his death ; only the month and the *tithi* are mentioned. According to *Gurulīlā* of Rāmarāya, Dāmodaradeva was expelled by Parīkṣitanārāyaṇa from his kingdom for an allegation brought against him by some interested parties that he had preached against the Brahminical creed. As a result, Dāmodaradeva sought refuge in the kingdom of Lakṣminārāyaṇa of western Kāmarūpa. Immediately after this incident, the biography tells that Parīkṣitanārāyaṇa was attacked and defeated by Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa with the help of the Mughal emperor. When Dāmodaradeva heard of this he is said to have remarked : "Let those who are in the kingdom of Parīkṣita now utter Āllāh and Khudā."[9]

According to Mr. Gait, Lakṣminārāyaṇa, with the help of the Mughals, invaded the eastern Koch kingdom in the year 1612 A.D. Now, if the above remark said to have been uttered by Dāmodaradeva is true then he could not have died in 1598 A.D. The biography of Nīlakaṇṭha further states that Dāmodaradeva's first death anniversary was performed during the reign of Vīranārāyaṇa, son of Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa who, according to Gait, reigned during 1622-1633 A.D. Therefore, taking into consideration the historical references contained in his biographies, Dāmodaradeva died near about 1621 A.D. There is no plausible reason to disbelieve the historical references as fictitious, because the biographers are generally found to be correct in describing the contemporary political events of Assam. Under the circumstances, even if his traditional span of life of 110 years be taken as correct, the date of his birth should be placed a few years later.

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[7] Ibid p. 17f.

[9] Rāmaarāya : *Gurulīlā*, p. 174.

[9] Rāmarāya : *Gurulīlā*, p. 174.

Life of Dāmodaradeva: Dāmodaradeva was the youngest son of Satānanda who migrated from a village near Hājo to Bardowā where he lived in close friendship with the family of Śaṅkaradeva. When the Koch invasion of eastern Assam in 1646 A.D. took place, he came to Hājo again with his brothers and thence after a few years to Barpetā where he met Śaṅkaradeva again.

Here in Barpetā, the religious life of Dāmodaradeva began. It has unanimously been admitted by the earlier biographers of Dāmodaradeva that he was inspired and influenced by that great Kāyastha reformer. It was from Śaṅkaradeva that he first received the impetus for adopting the life of a proselytiser.[11] Within a short time he could attract a band of faithful followers, mainly drawn from the Brahminical section and began to take active share in the devotional movement. He established a satra at Pāṭbāusi, near Barpeṭā, whence he directed activities of his disciples living at different place. His growing popularity and influence alarmed a few exponents of the Śakti cult who brought allegations in the court of Parīkṣitanārāyaṇa that he sowed seeds of dissension amongst the subjects by preaching against the established Śākta religion of the State, and by practising unorthodox religious observances. The king at once sent for him and asked him whether he would worship the Goddess Durgā and give up the unorthodox religious practices. On receiving a bold negative reply from Dāmoradeva the king ordered him to leave his kingdom immediately. Accordingly, Dāmodaradeva with some of his faithful disciples was escorted across the Sonkosh river which

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[10] *Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa putra Vīranārāyaṇa* 1
hena vārttā pāyā duiko niyāla tekhana 11
bolanta nṛipati duyojane śuniyoka 1
Prabhura vātsari mora rājye kariyoka 11
Nīlakantha, p. 178.

[11] Nīlakantha ; *Dāmodara-carita*, pp. 71, 87.
Rāmaarāya : *Gurulīlā*, pp. 42-43.

formed the western boundary of Parīkṣitanārāyaṇa's kingdom, under official supervision.

Laksmīnārāyaṇa, king of the western Koch kingdom, enthusiastically received Dāmodaradeva. A new monastery or a satra was built within the capital under the royal supervision wherein Dāmodaradeva with his accompanying disciples was lodged. All sorts of facilities that were necessary to lead a religious life unhindered, were placed at his disposal by the king.

According to Rāmarāya, Dāmodaradeva lived seven years in Cooch-Behar.[12] But we know from the same source that he left Kamarūpa for Cooch-Behar before the Mughal invasion of 1612 and his first death anniversary was celebrated during the reign of Vīranārāyaṇa who ascended the throne in 1622 A.D. So, Dāmodaradeva's stay at Cooch-Behar cannot be less than ten years. He died in or about 1620 A.D. at Cooch-Behar leaving Baladeva and Paramānanda, two of his faithful disciples who had accompanied from Kāmarūpa, as joint heads of the satra.

Relation with Śaṅkaradeva: Now, the question naturally arises as to his relationship with Śaṅkaradeva. The biographies of Śaṅkaradeva unanimously assert that Dāmodaradeva was the disciple of the former. All of them repeat the same story that Dāmodaradeva was a poor agriculturist who on his way to the field used to listen to the religious discourses of Śaṅkaradeva. The latter taking note of it one day advised him to devote himself whole-heartedly to the pursuit of religion by giving up his agricultural avocation. Dāmodaradeva, accordingly, became a disciple of Śaṅkaradeva, who after duly ordaining the former requested him to propagate the cult of devotion amongst the Brahmins. After the passing away of Śaṅkaradeva, there was a hitch between Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva As a result, the latter seceded from the Mahāpuruṣīyā sect headed by Mādhavadeva. Biographies of Dāmodaradeva, on the other hand, while acknowledging the help rendered by Śaṅkaradeva, assert that Dāmodaradeva received religious initiation from Caitanyadeva of Bengal. It is stated in these biographies that Śaṅkaradeva met Caitanyadeva at Nadiyā on his way to Puri during the course of his second pilgrimage. The Vaiṣṇava saint of Bengal sent through Śaṅkaradeva a sealed letter to Dāmodaradeva wherein necessary religious instructions were also inscribed. Dāmodaradeva henceforth began to consider himself a disciple of Caitanyadeva. According to Rāmarāya, Dāmodaradeva was initiated by the saint of Bengal during his sojourn to Kāmarūpa.[13]

But according to *Vaṁśīgopāladevar Caritra* by Rāmānanda, Dvija,

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[12] Rāmaarāya : *Gurulīlā*, p. 178.

[13] *Gurulīlā*, p. 41 ; *Dāmodara-carita*, pp. 74, 79.

Dāmodaradeva was initiated into the mystery of the Bhakti cult by one Vāsudeva Vipra of Orissa. This view has been supported by Maṇirām Barbhāṇḍār Barua in his chronicle *Buranjī-vivekaratna.*[13]*a*

Now, let us examine the possibility of Dāmodaradeva being initiated by Caitanya. The fact that Śaṅkaradeva met Chaitanya at Nadiyā during the course of his second pilgrimage is an anachronism, for Caitanyadeva was no more alive when Śaṅkaradeva had set out for his second pilgrimage which did not take place earlier than 1550 A.D. Secondly, religious teachings and practices by Dāmodaradeva widely differ from those of Caitanya. Rather, Dāmodaradeva's teachings and practices almost agree in fundamental points with those of Śaṅkaradeva. Thirdly, the Bengali sources have not mentioned Caitanya's visit to Kāmarūpa, nor have they mentioned Dāmodaradeva as one of the disciples of Caitanya.

On the other hand, the early biographers of Dāmodaradeva viz., Rāmarāya and Nīlakaṇṭha have indirectly acknowledged the indebtedness of Dāmodaradeva to Śaṅkaradeva. Rāmarāya, and Nīlakaṇṭha have made no discrimination between Śaṅkara, Mādhava and Dāmodara. Nīlakaṇṭha speaks thus : "Śaṅkara, Mādhava and Dāmodara are identical ; there is no distinction beween them."[14] Rāmarāya in a mythological strain says that Viṣṇu in the person of Dāmodaradeva would be a follower of Śiva in the person of Śaṅkaradeva.[15] Nīlakaṇṭha distinctly states that Dāmodaradeva turned a proselytiser at the behest of Śaṅkaradeva. He writes as follows :-

> "That place Barpeṭa became as it were a second Vaikuṇṭha where Śaṅkara, Mādhava and Dāmodara resided. Dāmodara used to recite the *Bhāgavata* regularly. One day, Śaṅkaradeva said to him ; "You please start initiating Brahmins, nobles and kings without any diffidence". To this Dāmodara replied : "You are burdening me with a noble responsibility when your own self is present."

Rāmarāya narrates an incident wherein it is stated that Śaṅkaradeva on one occasion took Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva to a secluded place where he revealed religious secrets to Mādhava in the presence of Dāmodaradeva.[17] The very fact of Dāmodaradeva being present there, leads one to infer a close tie between them. Nīlakaṇṭha says that Dāmodaradeva also duly celebrated the death anniversary of Śaṅkaradeva. If he was free from any spiritual tie with Śaṅkaradeva, then why did he perform the death anniversary ?

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[13]*a Vaṁśigopāladevar carita,* verses, 151-153.

[14] *Dāmodara-carita* p. 2.

[15] Rāmarāya : *Gurulīlā,* p. 7.

[16] *Dāmodara-carita,* pp. 71, 87.

[17] *Gurulīlā,* pp. 33-34.

All the above facts, considered dispassionately, points to the inevitable conclusion that Dāmodaradeva owed his religious impetus to Śaṅkaradeva.

But the assertion of the biographers of Śaṅkaradeva that Dāmodaradeva was his direct disciple cannot be accepted in view of the contrary opinion held unanimously by all the biographers of Dāmodaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva, no doubt, inspired and helped Dāmodaradeva to undertake the arduous life of a religious preacher and reformer, but he was not the *mantra-guru* of Dāmodaradeva, Vāsudeva Miśra of Orissa was probably his sacramental Guru as corroborated by the evidence supplied by Ramānanda Dvija and Maṇirām Barbhāṇḍar Barua.

Dāmodaradeva's contribution: Dāmodaradeva was not a poet like Śaṅkaradeva or Mādhavadeva, but as a religious organizer he could be ranked equally with them. After the death of Śaṅkaradeva, he disowned the leadership of Mādhavadeva and came out of the orthodox Mahāpuruṣīyā order to start a new sub-sect claiming complete independence of the sect founded by Śaṅkaradeva. This he could do by modifying the religious teachings and practices of the parent-cult by making a compromise between the path of devotion and the Brahminical practices. The path of devotion shown by Śaṅkaradeva leaves no room for Brahminical ritualism (at least in teachings, if not totally in practice) and that is why the Brahminical section traditionally steeped in ritualism looked with an eye of askance at the Bhakti cult. Dāmodaradeva could clearly see that the wholesale abolition of Brahminical rites and rituals would not only estrange the sympathy of the Brahmins but the opponents of the Bhakti movement would make a capital of it by interpreting the movement as a revolt against the Vedas. He, therefore, did not prohibit *nitya* (daily) and *naimittika* (occasional) duties of the Brahmins. This modification began to pay dividend immediately. The number of Brahmin disciples henceforth began to increase by leaps and bounds.

The success of Dāmodaradeva as a proselytiser largely depended on his method of propagation. He selected a few capable and scholarly young men whom he sent to different directions of Kāmarūpa where they were installed as local religious heads. He remained as the radiating figure guiding and directing them whenever necessary. Biographer Nīlakaṇṭha gives a detailed list of persons sent by Dāmodaradeva to different directions.

"Santadeva went over to a place named Garemārā to the south of the Brahmaputra and there he established himself as a proselytiser. Bhagavāndeva, proceeding northward, established a satra at Nimiṣā whence he propagated his faith. Gopāla Miśra remained at Khudiyā to the east of Barpeṭā. Arjunadeva and Manohara Kāyastha propagated the *Nāma-dharma* at Loca and Palwā. Vaṁśīgopāladeva went further east carrying the message of his Guru Dāmodaradeva."[18]

Expulsion of Dāmodara from Kāmarūpa by Parīkṣitanārāyaṇa proved a blessing in disguise. It gave him an opportunity to extend the jurisdiction of his religious activities to Cooch-Behar. With the help of king Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa he organised a satra in Cooch-Behar on a grand scale from where he viewed the activities of the regional religious heads appointed by him and received tithes from them in recognition of his pontifical position. Gopāla Miśra in his *Ghoṣā-ratna* describes graphically the pontifical position of Dāmodaradeva in relation to the regional heads who derived authority from him.[19]

To the growth of the satra institution Dāmodaradeva's contribution cannot be ignored. Probably it was Dāmodaradeva who for the first time introduced the system of paying religious tithe (*dharmar kar*) by disciples to their respective satras. According to biographers, Dāmodaradeva, on the eve of his death, having invited his principal disciples asked them to pay annual tithe to Bhaṭṭadeva whom he nominated as his successor.[20] This new system of paying something in cash or kind to the central satra perhaps induced the local or regional satras to levy a voluntary tax on their disciples. The new system helped to improve the financial condition of satras.

From the account, given by Rāmarāya, of the satra of Dāmodaradeva at Cooch-Behar, it can be inferred too that he had a hand in giving a definite shape to the structural pattern of the satra institution. Rāmarāya wrote his biography about twentyfive years after the death of Dāmodaradeva. His almost contemporary account of the satra of Dāmodaradeva at Cooch-Behar practically resembles a monastic satra of the present day.[21] That Dāmodaradeva had some hand in the structural growth of the satra institution is further corroborated by an evidence supplied by *Śaṅkara-carita* of Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur. It is stated that Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākur, one of the prominent disciples of Śaṅkaradeva and a collegue of Mādhavadeva once advised the latter to establish a satra on the lines of Dāmodaradeva's satra at Pāṭbausi. Mādhavadeva accordingly reorganised and reconstructed the satra at Barpeta.[22]

Latter history of the sub-sect

Bhaṭṭadeva: On the eve of his death Dāmodaradeva nominated Vaikuṇṭhanatha Bhāgavata-Bhattācāryya *alias* Bhaṭṭadeva as his successor.[23]

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[18] *Dāmodara-carita,* p. 153.

[19] Gopāla Miśra : *Ghoṣā-ratna,* p. 157f.

[20] *Dāmodara-carita* p. 144 ; *Gurulīlā,* pp. 209f, 218.

[21] *Gurulīlā,* p. 157f.

[22] Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carita,* p. 310.

[23] *Dāmodara-carita,* p. 144 ; *Gurulīlā,* p. 218.

By virtue of this nomination Bhaṭṭadeva became the head of all proselytisers operating in different parts of Kāmarūpa and Cooch-Behar. Bhaṭṭadeva amply justified his selection. The Dāmodarī sect of lower Assam owes its glory, prestige and influence as much as to Bhaṭṭadeva as to Dāmodaradeva. His profound scholarship, imposing and charming personality and above all his deep devotion brought unstinted support and allegiance from all sections of disciples of Dāmodaradeva and even his erstwhile colleagues unreservedly paid allegiance to him. Thus Rāmarāya speaks,

"Bhaṭṭadeva holds the staff of authority over the path of devotion in both the kingdoms. He is the head of all *medhis* (local religious agents) of different places.[24]"

His works: Bhaṭṭadeva translated into Assamese prose the three most important Vaiṣṇava scriptures, viz. *Bhāgavata, Gītā* and *Ratnāvalī* and this gave to his sect a set of religious scriptures in their own language. Further, the fundamental principles and practices of the cult have been set forth in his three important works, viz, *Bhakti-viveka, Śaraṇa-saṁgraha* and *Prasaṅga-mālā,* of which the first one is in Sanskrit and the last two in Assamese. These devotional and liturgical works written by him, greatly helped towards laying a surer foundation of the cult. He maintained a regular Sanskrit *tol* (school) within the satra for his disciples from which he annually sent out hundreds of youngmen well-versed in Vaiṣṇavite lores to various regions of Kāmarūpa, entrusting them with the responsibility of spreading the cult.[25] Thus a network of satras was established throughout the region of Kāmarūpa under the guidance of Bhaṭṭadeva. Bhaṭṭadeva died in the second quarter of the 17th. century and after him no personality of the sub-sect having his scholarship, status and dignity flourished in Kāmarūpa.

The satra in Cooch-Behar after Dāmodaradeva: After the death of Dāmodaradeva, his satra in Cooch-Behar was jointly held by Baladeva and Paramānanda, two of his faithful disciples. Vanamālideva, a disciple of Baladeva about whom more will be spoken later on, conducted the affairs of the satra after their death, but soon a rift took place between two contending parties for the headship of the satra. King Praṇanārāyaṇa with a view to accommodating the contending parties, established another satra which was named as Vaikuṇṭhapura satra, and Vanamālideva was placed in charge of it.[26] After some time, Vanamālideva left for eastern Assam on the invitation of the Ahom King Jayadhvaja Siṁha. The history of the Dāmodarī sect in Cooch-Behar after this, is a history of gradual decay and obscurity.

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[24] *Gurulīlā,* p. 210.

[25] Ibid, p. 207.

[26] Ibid, p. 197ff.

Vaṁśīgopāladeva: The history of this sub-sect in eastern Assam begins with Vaṁśigopāladeva. Vaṁśīgopāladeva, who lost his parents early, hailed from Mālipur in eastern Assam on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra. He approached Mādhavadeva at first for religious guidance, but the latter sent him to Dāmodaradeva for necessary initiation. Though he received initiation from Dāṁodara, he spent a few years afterwards with Mādhavadeva for training in devotional matters.

He was deputed both by Dāmodaradeva and Mādhavadeva to spread the message and teachings of Vaiṣṇavism in eastern Assam. The Vaiṣṇavite movement till then could not penetrate into eastern Assam because of the hostile attitude of the Ahom kings and indifference of the local people. Even Śaṅkaradeva who spent his early life in Central Assam and nearly twenty years in different places of eastern Assam could not make much headway owing to the hostile attitude of the Ahom monarchs. Finally when his son-in-law was beheaded at the instance of the Ahom king, he took the earliest opportunity to come over to western Assam. So, when Vaṁśīgopāladeva was entrusted with the missionary task, he at first showed his reluctance, knowing well the dangers and difficulties ahead. But once he accepted the responsibility, he left no stone unturned even at the risk of his life to spread the Vaiṣṇavite cult. He was assisted in this respect by Yadumaṇi, a Brāhmin disciple of Harideva.

Vaṁśigopāla at first settled himself at Kāhikuchi, somewhere within the modern Lakhimpur district and began to preach the devotional doctrines to neighbouring villagers. Here he encountered the greatest opposition from the Tantric-Buddhists who made several attempts on his life.

He, therefore, abandoned this satra and moved to kalābāri and thence to Deberāpār. While he was residing in the last named place with his disciples, he incurred the wrath of the Ahom king Pratāpa Siṁha, who sending a batch of soldiers raged the satra to the ground and took Gopāladeva with his disciples as captives. His escape from imminent death was due to the self-sacrifice of one of his disciples who impersonated himself as Gopāladeva and thereby courted death. For a considerable time Vaṁśīgopāladeva, with his faithful followers, had to move from place to place avoiding the notice of the royal officers, and in course of this period he established twelve temporary satras at different places. Even during this period of underground stage he did not give up preaching. At last, the king came to know of his innocence and pardoned him. He came out of his hiding place and established permanently a new satra at Kuruwābāhi near the mouth of the river Dhansiri. Here, according to *Vaṁśīgopāladevar carita* he died in the year 1634 A.D.

Vaṁśīgopāladeva's contribution: Besides satras established by him in course of his movement from place to place, he deputed fortyfive of his disciples to different places delegating powers to establish satras and to initiate disciples. A detailed list of persons deputed by him is found in *Santa-*

saṁpradā by Govindadāsa who wrote his work during the reign of king Rudra Siṁha.[27]

The credit of firmly establishing Vaiṣṇavism in eastern Assam against heavy odds is due to Vaṁśīgopāladeva. For nearly a decade he had to remain underground to save himself from the oppression of the Ahom king, yet he did not give up his proselytising activities. He had to fight against the so called *Baudhas* who even tried to poison him to death. Fighting successfully against hostile elements he made eastern Assam almost safe for Vaiṣṇavas.

The contribution of Vaṁśigopāladeva to the organizational side of the satra institution deserves notice. When he permanently established a satra at Kuruwābāhi he constructed a huge prayer-hall capable of accommodating several hundred devotees, and huts for celibate devotees were raised in an orderly manner around the central prayer hall. In order to facilitate the smooth working of the institution he allotted different functions to different individuals and thus a regular set of functionaries with fixed duty came into existence. The contemporary biographer Ramānanda gives a detailed list of persons with their newly allotted duties.[28]

His successors: Vaṁśīgopāladeva died a celibate. Miśradeva brought up and trained by Vaṁśīgopāladeva from his boyhood, became the head of the Kuruwābāhi satra. Giving up the simple and austere life of his predecessor, Miśradeva resorted to pomp and luxury. One Satānanda *alias* Śatāi being jealous of Miśradeva's affluence and prestige brought an allegation against him in the court of the Ahom king that the *satrādhikāra* of the Kuruwābāhi satra had been trying to usurp the royal power. The king without proper enquiry into the truth of the report ordered for the demolition of the Kuruwābāhi satra. Accordingly, the satra was set on fire and Miśradeva was taken to the capital as a prisoner. He died very soon as a prisoner. In the meantime the old king Pratāpa Siṁha also died and was succeeded by Suramphā (1641-44) who took a kindly view of the Vaiṣṇavas. He ordered the reconstruction of the Kuruwābāhi satra and placed Jayaharideva as its head. But Jayaharideva died very soon leaving Rāmakṛṣṇa, son of Miśradeva and Lakṣmīnārāyana, his own nephew in minority. Nirañjanadeva the ablest and senior-most devotee of the satra was placed in charge of the satra.

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[27] The *Santa-saṁpradā* gives the following list of Medhis sent by Vaṁśīgopāladeva to different places. (1) Nityānanda to Belsidhiyā, (2) Barāgi Bāpu to Cāriṅg, (3) Bharathi Bāpu to Dergā̃on, (4) Mukunda Bāpu to Dhāpkaṭā, (5) Jayarāma Bapu to Jiyāmarā, (6) Kṛṣṇa Bāpu to Kaliābar, (7) Nārayaṇa Bapu to Kukurakaṭa, (8) Viṣṇu Bāpu to Śalaguri, (9) Govinda Bāpu to Tipām, (10) Caturbhuja Bāpu to Batārgā̃on, (11) Kāmdeva Bāpu to Dvārakiyā, (12) Chidānanda to Kalabarī, (13) Bhavānanda to Dhāpaliyā, (14) Nityānanda to Pātkaṭā, (15) Manohara to Tulaśījan, (16) Purnananda to Ratanpura, (17) Kṛṣṇacaraṇa to Dichai, (18) Hari Miśra to Ghuriyāgā̃yā, (19) Lakṣmaṇ and Karuṇā to Tāmolbārī, (20) Śrīdhara Bhāgati to Kārigā̃ŏn, (21) Kriṣṇānanda to Kharaṅgi, (22) Nirañjana to Bāndarkhel, (23) Bar-Bāpu to Rūpkaliyā, (24) Śingāl Miśra to Dihājān, (25) Mohana Miśra to Keliyāl, (26) Dayāl Bāpu to Maṇipura, (27) Haricaraṇa to Cinātali, (28) Hari Bāpu to Lijuā, (29) Arjuna Deuri to Dhakuākhanā, (30) Kalki Bāpu to Karā̃i-Khowā, (31) Ananta Kandali to Kâhikuchi, (32) Rāmacaraṇa Bāpu to Kākiyāl, (33) Raghupati to Dikhaumukh, (34) Haricaraṇa to Dhemāji, (35) Hari Miśra to Camaguri and, (36) Rāma Miśra, (37) Gadādhara, (38) Govinda Bāpu, (39) Gopāl Bāpu and six others to different places. Altogether fortyfive preachers were appointed to carry on religious propagation at different places.

[28] Ramānanda : *Vaṁśīgopāladevar Carita*, p. 67.

King Surmphā was deposed after three or four years of his reign and he was followed by two kings in quick succession. The last of these two kings viz., Jayadhvaja Siṁha (1648-1663), on assuming office, desired to make certain amends for misdeeds and oppression of Pratāpa Siṁha. He exprssed his willingness to be initiated by the son of Miśradeva. The latter, still a minor could not venture to do so and therefore Nirañjanadeva had to come forward to initiate the king. After the initiation ceremony Nirañjanadeva was installed as the head of a newly built satra which came to be known as Āuniāti. For the maintenance of the satra some thousand acres of land and a few hundred *pāiks* were placed at the disposal of the satra.

The prestige and influence acquired by Nirañjanadeva by virtue of his position as the spiritual preceptor of the king, made Rāmakṛṣṇa and Laksminārāyaṇa a bit jealous. They appealed to the king for the return of the idol of Viṣṇu (*Govinda-mūrti*) and a few other things taken away by Nirañjanadeva from the Kuruwābāhi satra. The king, however did not grant their appeal. He, instead, patronised Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa by placing the latter as the head of a newly built satra which came to be known as the Garamūr satra. According to the account submitted by the head of the Garamūr satra to the Government of Assam, 1904, Jayarāmadeva, a nephew of Lakṣminārāyaṇa was the founder of this satra and received patronage from king Śiva Siṁha[29] (1714-1744).

Vanamālīdeva: Another noteworthy figure of the sub-sect of Dāmodaradeva who did a lot towards establishing Vaiṣṇavism in eastern Assam, is Vanamālīdeva. He was born, according to *Vanamālīdevar carita,* in the year 1576 A.D. at Kalābāri in the present district of Darrang. He was handed over to Vaṁśīgopāladeva at the age of six. It is described in his biography that he could explain and interpret the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* even from his boyhood. He lived with Vaṁśīgopāladeva till the latter's death and during the chaotic condition that prevailed immediately after

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[29] Govindadāsa : *Śanta-saṁpradā,* chapter V ; Transcript vol. XXIII (D.H.A.S.).

Vaṁśigopāladeva, he repaired to Cooch-Behar where he succeeded Baladeva and Paramānanda as the head of the Behar satra of Dāmodaradeva. But as his nomination to the headship of the satra was not liked by the relatives of Baladeva and Paramānanda, he did not deem it proper to hold the office of the *satrādhikāra* any longer. Therefore, he left the satra and went on a pilgrimage as far as Puri.

King Jayadhvaja Siṁha was a great admirer of Vanamālīdeva and had been pressing him for some time to return to his kingdom. Accordingly, on his way back from Puri, Vanamālīdeva strait-way proceeded to Gauhati where he was formally received by the officers of Jayadhvaja Siṁha. In the meantime the Mughal invasion under Mirjumla took place. Being defeated by the Mughal the king retreated to the south. After the conclusion of the treaty, Jayadhvaja Siṁha returned to his capital. In 1653 A.D. a new satra under the royal supervision was constructed to the south of the river Lohit within the islet of the Brahmaputra. Here Vanamālīdeva was duly installed as the head. The prestige and affluence of this satra further enhanced during the reign of Chakradhvaja Siṁha, Udayāditya Siṁha and Ratnadhvaja Siṁha who, according to *Vanamālīdevar Caritra*, were disciples of Vanamālideva.[30]

Vanamālīdeva established several satras in central and eastern Assam installing therein idols of Viṣṇu. He is supposed to have introduced the system of Tāntric and Purāṇic *dīksā* in addition to the usual *śaraṇa* system of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism. He was instrumental in initiating a period of close contact between the satra institution and the royal court. He died in the year 1683 A.D. After him no personality of this sub-sect worthy of deserving out notice flourished in eastern Assam.

1 (B) *The sub-sect of Harideva*

The so called Haridevī sect is generally taken as a branch of the Brahma Saṁhati because of the existence of the Brahminical rituals alongside the devotional practices. Excepting the manner and procedure of conducting devotional services, the Haridevī sub-sect is practically identical in fundamental teachings and practices with the sub-sect of Dāmodaradeva.

Relation with Śaṅkaradeva: It has already been said that all the biographies of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva have uniformly stated that Harideva was one of the four *dharmācāryas* appointed by Śaṅkaradeva. The biography of Dāmodaradeva by Nīlakantha Dāsa also refers to Harideva as a follower of Śaṅkaradeva.[31] Even *Harideva-carita* by Baneswara Dvija also admits the indebtedness of Harideva to Śaṅkaradeva in the following way.

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[30] Ramākanta : *Vanamālidevar Carita*, p. 15.

[31] Nīlakanṭha : *Dāmodara-carita*, p. 103, verse, 394.

"There will be an incarnation of Viṣṇu by the name of Śaṅkaradeva in Kali yuga, who will emancipate people by his preachings on knowledge and devotion. In order to release people from the bondage of the world he will explain everything on knowledge and devotion to a Brahmin named Harideva."[32]

Moreover, the sub-sect does not differ in essential points from the sect founded by Śaṅkaradeva. These alone will show that independence of the sect claimed by the followers of Harideva is based rather on sectarian zeal than on genuine ground.

Harideva: Harideva was born in a Brahmin family in the year 1493 (1415 *Śakabda*) A.D. His family originally hailed from Nārāyaṇapura in eastern Assam and later on migrated to Kāmarūpa and settled at a place called Bahari. He died according to *Harideva-carita* in the year 1568 A.D., the year in which Śaṅkaradeva also said to have breathed his last. He is said to have performed many miracles, such as restoring of eye-sight to blind persons and swallowing of poison without any ill effect.[33] According to the above biography he preached the Bhakti cult independently of Śaṅkaradeva, and the latter not only admired him but duly honoured him by celebrating a big festival which continued for seven days. The satra of Harideva for that reason came to be known as Māneri (*māna*=honour[34])

Harideva had no son and therefore, on the eve of his death nominated his daughter Bhuvaneśvarī for the headship of his satra at Māneri. Perhaps this is the first instance of nominating a woman to the position of a religious head. The later history of the sub-sect after Bhuvaneśvarī is devoid of any notable event. The three principal disciples of Harideva, viz., Haricaraṇadeva, Jagannāthadeva, and Nārāyaṇadeva propagated the teachings and practices of the sub-sect in different directions of western Assam. But the sphere of their religious activity did not extend beyond the present district of Kāmarūpa and parts of Goalpara and Darrang district. His another disciple, Yadumaṇideva accompanied Vaṁśīgopāla to eastern Assam to propagate the faith.

Characteristics of the Brahma Saṁhati: The Brahma Saṁhati comprising two sub-sects and consisting of the most affluent satras of Assam, is naturally the most influential of the saṁhatis. Most of the satras affiliated to this saṁhati are headed by Brahmins, though non-Brahmin heads are not altogether negligible. Some satras affiliated to this saṁhati developed fully the monastic characteristics. The compromising approach of the Brahma Saṁhati considerably removed the misapprehension of a section of orthodox people who considered the new Vaiṣṇava faith un-Vedic and as such contrary to the traditional Hindu religion. The leaders of the Brahma Saṁhati showed that the Vedic and Purāṇic rituals and devotional practices are not mutually exclusive. One can be a good Vaiṣṇava even performing daily and occasional rites enjoined by the *dharmaśāstras*.

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[32] *Śrī-Śaṅkara nāme āsi avatāra haiba* ।
Jñāna-bhakti upadeśa loka nistāriba ॥
loka tāribāka hetu pṛthivīka āsi ।
Harideva Brāhmaṇat kahiba prakāśi ॥
Dhaneswar & Baneswar : *Harideva-carita*, p. 37.

[33] Dhaneśwara and Bāneśwara Dvija : *Harideva-carita*, pp. 101-103.

[34] Ibid, p. 99.

Dāmodaradeva on the eve of his departure to Cooch-Behar advised his favourite disciple Bhaṭṭadeva in the following way :

"Do not alienate the Brahmins by telling them to give up *nitya* and *naimittika* rites. But yourself set an example by performing daily rites like *sandhyā,* and *āhṇikas* regularly."

This chalking out of a middle path between Vedic rites and rituals and devotional practices helped considerably to win over the twice-born classes to the fold of Brahma Saṁhati. Of the four fundamental elements (*vastus*), it lays special emphasis on *deva* (god) and that is why images of Viṣṇu and *sālagrāma-śilā,* the symbol of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa are considered necessary in satras as well as in households. Though the originators of the two sub-sects did not tolerate the worship of any other god than Viṣṇu the followers, later on, began to take a liberal view as regards the worship of other gods or goddesses. They did not, however, personally encourage or practise it.

Principal satras of the Brahma Śaṁhati

The total number of satras affiliated to the sub-sect of Dāmodaradeva exceeds one hundred in the entire Brahmaputra valley, and the number of disciples is larger than those of any other sub-sect. The most important satras of this sub-sect in western Assam is Pātbāusi established by Dāmodaradeva himself. Vyāskuchi satra established by Bhaṭṭadeva comes next. The other notable satras of this sub-sect established by principal disciples, are Govindapura, Loca, Garemārā (Amranga), Khudiyā and Palwā.

The most influential and affluent satras of eastern Assam are Āuniāti, Dakhiṇapāt, Garamūr and Kuruwābāhi popularly known as *cāri-satras*. The first three are purely monastic in nature and are situated in Majuli (the island of the Brahmaputra). The first three trace their genealogy to Vaṁśigopāladeva and the last one to Vanamālideva. The satras established by Yadumaṇideva who accompanied Vaṁśigopāladeva to eastern Assam and by his sons, are Ādhār, Māhārā, Patiyari and Dokharāmukh.

Each of the principal satras mentioned above have several branches at different parts of eastern and western Assam.

The most important satra of the Haridevī sect is Māneri established by the founder himself. The other notable satras established by his disciples are Bainākuchi, Jāgārā, Subhā, and Parenā. Each has more branches than one. All these are situated in the district of Kāmarūpa and Goalpara.

(II). *KĀLA SAMHATI*

We have already stated that the Kāla Saṁhati owes for its origin to Gopāla Ātā of Bhawānipura. He was one of the twelve apostles (*dharmācāryas*) nominated by Mādhavadeva. The followers of this branch of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism claim that Mādhavadeva nominated Gopāladeva as the supreme religious head after him.

Gopāla Ātā of Bhawānipura: Gopāl Ātā was the son of one Kāmeswar Bhuyā̃ and hailed from the village Nācani-ghāt of eastern Assam. During the Koch invasion of 1562 A.D. he migrated to western Assam with his father where he was duly initiated to the Vaiṣṇava faith by Mādhavadeva. But before this, he had developed a slight inclination towards Bengal Vaiṣṇavism having been in constant touch with a proselytiser of the Bengal school of Vaiṣṇavism.[35] He gave up this idea after his initiation by Mādhavadeva. Henceforth Gopāla began to lead the life of a vaiṣṇava devotee and very shortly became one of the right-hand man of Mādhavadeva.

He was very much adept in illustrating abstract teachings and precepts with appropriate stories and parables for which he was known as *kathār-sāgar* (ocean of stories). His advice was eagerly sought not only by his colleagues but even by his Guru as well. Padma Ātā, *alias* Badalā Ātā who had his initiation from Mādhavadeva during the last days of his life was advised by the latter to meet Gopāla on his way back to eastern Assam, for Gopāla Ātā was considered as competent as Mādhavadeva to teach religious matters. After Mādhavadeva, Gopāla's help was eagerly sought by Vaiṣṇavas whenever a decision on various religious matters could not be arrived at. His biography mentions several incidents where we find Gopāla Ātā, by his tactful handling of situation, maintaining unity and concord amongst Vaiṣṇavas. He was also a strict disciplinartian and did not tolerate any laxity on the part of his disciples.

His twelve principal disciples: Gopāl Ātā also nominated twelve principal disciples or apostles to act as regional religious heads. They were—(1) Bar Yadumaṇi (2) Saru Yadumaṇi (3) Murāri (4) Nārāyaṇa (5) Sanātana (6) Aniruddha (7) Śrīrāma (8) Rāmachandra (9) Puruṣottama (10) Rāmacaraṅa (11) Paramānanda (12) Daloipo-Sanātana. The first six were non-Brahmins and the rest were Brahmins. They were sent to different parts of Assam for the propagation of the faith. As a result, several satras came into existence for the purpose of religious propagation.

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[35] T. N. Goswami (edited) : *Gopāla Ātā-carita*, p. 18.

Gopāla Ātā established a permanent satra at Kālajhār, a place situated at a few miles' distance from Bhawānipura where he died in 1611 A.D. at the age of seventy.[36] His eldest son died in his life time and the younger ones were minor when he died. The satra at Kālajhār after his death was run for a few years by Śrīrām Ātā, but later on he moved to eastern Assam abandoning the satra. After a period of temporary eclipse the satra was again revived by the descendants of Gopāla Ātā.

He left two dramatic compositions, viz., *Gopī-Uddhava-saṁvāda* and *Janma-yātrā* and several songs for the posterity. The most notable religious contribution, according to tradition, is that he brought to the forefront the doctrine of *Guruvāda.*[37] The Guru in his sub-sect occupies the same exalted position as that of Sikhism.

The twelve Ācāryas nominated by Gopāla Ātā preached the message of the Kāla Saṁhati in different directions. The notable branches of the Kāla Saṁhati which greatly contributed to the development of the sub-sect, are Dihing, Māyāmarā, Gajalā and Āhātaguri. The first two branches deserve special consideration for their historical importance.

Dihiṅgīyā branch: The foundation of the Dihiṅgīyā branch of the Kāla Saṁhati was laid by Bar Yadumaṇi, also known as Heṅguliyā Yadumaṇi, because of his preference for vermilion colour (*heṅgul*=red). It is narrated in the biographical works that Bar Yadumani's original name was Gopāla and he resided in the early part of his career with Śrīrāma Sarma in the satra of Vaṁśigopāladeva at Deberāpār for a few years as a novice. Vaṁśigopāladeva on a certain occasion sent them to Barpetā with some presents to be delivered to the principal religious leaders. Accordingly, they came to Barpetā where they happened to meet Gopāla Ātā of Bhawānipura and were highly impressed by his scholarship and saintly behaviour. Gopāla Ātā gave them a copy of *Nāmaghoṣā* which they began to recite after their return to the satra of Vaṁśīgopāladeva. Vaṁśīgopāladeva asked them, either to stop reading of *Ghoṣā* or to leave his satra for good. They preferred the latter alternative and came back to the satra of Gopāla Ātā where they were duly ordained. Gopāla Ātā changed the original name of Gopāla, to Yadumaṇi, a common practice still prevalent in the satras of Kāla Saṁhati. In order to distinguish him from another Yadumaṇi, he is popularly known as Bar Yadumaṇi i.e., Yadumaṇi the senior. After a few years. Yadumaṇi came back to his native place in eastern Assam where he established a satra at a place known as Bāhbārī.[38] Bar Yadumaṇi was not only an able exponent of the Vaiṣṇava faith and a zealous proselytiser, but was also a poet of considerable merit. He leaves behind more than hundred devotional lyrics and one or two devotional plays.

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[36] Ibid, p. X (introduction).

[37] *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 521; *Gopāla Ātā-carita*, p. XII.

[38] *Gopāla-Ātā-carita*, p. 175ff; Ramānanda : *Gopāladevar Carita* (MS).

Dihing satra was established by the eldest son of Bar Yadumaṇi and within a few years of its establishment became one of the leading satras of eastern Assam. It mainly concentrated its proselytising activities to the socially backward communities and thus gathered a large following within a short time. The number of its disciples became too numerous within a short time and it added in no less a degree to the prosperity of satra. The satra could claim some of the leading officers of the Ahom court as disciples of whom Kīrticandra Barbarua, the right-hand man of Rājeswara Siṁha and Lakṣmī Siṁha may be specially mentioned.[39]

Because of its numerous followers and considerable power and wealth, King Rājeswara Siṁha and Lakṣmī Siṁha solicited the friendship with the head of this satra as a counter-measure against the impending Māyāmarīyā revolt.[40] Thus the two important branches of the Kāla Saṁhati viz., the Dihiṅgīyā and the Māyāmarīya came to an open conflict. The followers of the former were royalists, while those of the latter were insurgents. The conflict thus created continued till recent times between these two important branches of the same sub-sect.

Māyamarā branch: The other important branch of the Kāla Śaṁhati viz., the Māyāmarā, owes its origin to Aniruddha Bhūyā (1553-1626). He translated the fourth and fifth Book of the *Bhāgavata-puraṇa* and composed a large number of songs in Assamese which bear testimony to his scholarship and religious fervour.

The term *Māyāmarā* or *Moāmarā* deserves some consideration here. Aniruddha was said to have been in possession of tantric scripture with the help of which he could perform miracles. It is further narrated in *Aniruddhadevar Carita* that he was adept in Yogic practices also. It is stated that once Khorā Rajā, the ahom king, invited Aniruddha to his court to test his magical power. The king, covering the mouth of an empty pitcher, asked him to tell without uncovering its mouth of the unknown thing it contained. Aniruddha by his magical power created an illusory snake and told him accordingly. On the removal of the cloth a cobra actually came out from the pot. At the request of the king Aniruddha caused the serpent to disappear again. For this magical power the king gave him the appellation *Māyāmarā* which literally means one who dominates over Māyā (*māyā* :—illusion, magic)[41] The term *Māyāmarā* afterwards corrupted into *Moāmarā* and *Moāmariyā* owing to confusion created by the name of a lake *Moāmarā* on the banks of which the Māyāmarā satra was situated in the early part of its history.[42]

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[39] D. Hazarika : *Dihing Satrar Buranjī* (MS. D.H.A.S., Gauhati).
[40] S. K. Bhuyan (edited) : *Asamar Padya Buranjī* : p. 83f.
[41] Chidānanda Goswami : *Aniruddhadevar Carita,* p. 28.

The followers are also known as *Maṭak*. According to the sectarian interpretation, the word *Maṭak* is a compound word, composed of *mat* (faith) and *eka* (one) i.e., men of one faith.[43] But the explanation of the term as suggested by Gait in the census report of 1891 seems to be a correct one. He writes : "When the Singphos began to raid in Assam, they found the Senapaty-people (i.e., the people ruled by Bar Senāpati) better able to defend themselves than those residing under the decayed power of Ahoms and therefore called them *Maṭak* meaning strong as distinguished from M*ulung* or weaker subjects of the Ahoms. The term *Maṭak* thus applies simply to the people residing the tract of the country formerly ruled by Bar Senāpaty and has no reference to any particular caste or tribe. As the majority of the inhabitants of this tract are disciples of Moāmariyā Gosain, the word has almost been synonymous with Moāmarā".[44]

Disciples of the Māyāmarā Gosain are also known as *Puraṇi-bhakat*. The reason for designating them so is obscure. One interpretation as stated in *Aniruddhadevar Carita* is that he (Aniruddha) went to meet Gopāla Ātā by an old road, avoiding the newly constructed one, and that was why he was named *puraṇi* (old) *bhakat* (devotee) and his disciples also came to be known by that epithet.[45] But the reason stated seems to be a later-day invention. Another explanation generally taken to be more realistic is that Aniruddha's followers consisting mostly of tribal and low-class people did not altogether gave up their old practices even after their conversion and some of their old practices and manners persisted under the cloak of Vaiṣṇavism and this adherence to old customs (*puraṇi-prathā*) was perhaps responsible for lending the epithet to the followers of Aniruddha.

Aniruddha concentrated his work mainly amongst the Chutiyās, Morāṇs and other tribal people, though the Hindus of upper classes were not altogether left out. It is narrated in *Ādi Carita* that the cause of Aniruddha's rapid success in the proselytising activity was the magical power exercised by him with the help of a tantric scripture which originally belonged to Śaṅkaradeva's family.[46]

The Māyāmarā Mahanta became in course of time more than an agent ministering only to the spiritual needs of his disciples : he became the virtual sovereign of the Morāṇs by making them to submit to his teachings with unflinching obedience. They were taught to regard the Guru as God in human form. As Aniruddha admitted converts from non-Aryan tribes and placed the disciples on an elevated footing and as his satra was run on a democratic basis the number of disciples increased by leaps and bounds which excited the jealousy of other satras. Aniruddha was, therefore, branded as a dissenter, a promoter of heterodoxy for offering initiation to unrefined tribes. The prevalence of certain tantric rites amongst some of his followers was attributed to him and to his successors' connivance.

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[42] E. Gait : *History of Assam*, p. 59.

[43] C. Goswami : *Aniruddadevar Carita*, p. 50.

[44] *Census Report of Assam* 1891, p. 266f.

[45] C. Goswami : *Aniruddhadevar Carita*, p. 50.

[46] B. C. Das (edited) : *Ādi-carita*, p. 69ff.

The Māyāmarīyās were notable for their fanatical devotion to their Gurus and uncommon exclusiveness in their observances. Unity and concord amongst themselves were unique and the binding link were the successive Gurus. Because of the unique hold over disciples and of the material prosperity, the Māyāmarīyā Gosains were looked upon with jealousy and suspicion by the Ahom monarchs right up from the times of Pratapa Siṁha down to the last days of Ahom rule. The fourth *adhikāra* Nityānanda was killed at the instance of Bhagārajā, and the fifth *adhikāra* Jayarāma had to remain in concealment for several years during the reign of Jayadhvaja Siṁha. Similar acts of oppression and persecution over the Māyāmarā Gosains and their disciples ultimately drove them to a desperate stage of an open rebellion. The history of Assam from 1770 to 1795 A.D. is the history of the rebellion mainly initiated and conducted by this sect of Vaiṣṇavas and ultimately the rebellion had to be quelled with the help of the British. The chronicle of the Māyāmarā satra narrates that out of eight lacs of disciples, only about ten thousands remained after the rebellion. Most of them were either killed by the royalists or took refuse in hills and distant places.

Gajalā and Āhātaguri: The Gajalā satra, founded by Saru Yadumaṇi, with its several branches and off-shoots, constitutes another important branch of the Kāla Saṁhati. This branch has twentyfour affiliated satras established by descendants and disciples of Saru Yadumaṇi in the different parts of eastern Assam. Another notable disciple of Gopāla Ātā is Śrīrāma Sarmā of the Āhātaguri satra whose disciples and decendants are responsible for establishing a number of satras in central and eastern Assam. His son Rāmānanda, celebrated biographer of Śaṅkaradeva and Gopāla Ātā, and his grandson Rāmagopāla, as known from *Rāmagopāla-carita,* were also zealous proselytisers.

Characteristics of the Kāla Saṁhati: Having given a short history of the important branches of the Kāla Saṁhati it would not be out place to state here the main characteristics of the sub-sect during the last three hundred years of its history. The first and the foremost thing, as has been already stated, is the supreme position occupied by the Guru. To the followers of this subsect the Guru is God in human form. An interesting account of *guru-bhakti* is given in the biography of Gopāla Ātā. Once Puruṣottama Ṭhākur abused Gopāla Ātā in the presence of the latter's disciple Rāmacandra. Rāmacandra unable to tolerate the aspersions cast on his Guru violenly struck his head against a solid slab of stone and as a result sustained injury in his head which caused profuse bleeding. The extremists of the Kāla Saṁhati viz. the Māyāmarīyās cut the doors of their houses through the gable-ends so that they might not be required to lower heads while they passed through them. The side walls of village huts, being very low, it is difficult to pass through doors fitted to side-walls without lowering one's head. As the Māyāmarīyas did not bow their heads to any one but their Guru, the doors were accordingly fitted to the gable-ends. This fanatical reverence to their Guru was put to a severe test by the Ahom king Pratāpa Siṁha. He, as told in the biography of Aniruddhadeva, ordered a few followers of this sub-sect to gallop at the highest speed across a hanging sword kept at the level of the neck of the galloping horsemen. The horsemen, accordingly, did so without lowering their heads and as a result their heads were severed from the trunks.[47] The Māyāmarīyā rebellion of the eighteenth century against the Ahom rule was to a great extent a vindictive uprise against the oppression of the Ahom monarchs on successive religious heads of the Māyāmarā satra. Their very war-cry was : "I will kill or will be killed and thus I will repay the debt to my Guru."[48]

The next important fact to be noted is the softening of the rigour of caste distinction. Though the practice of inter-dining and inter-marriage were not prevalent, yet no distinction was made between one disciple and another on grounds of caste. *Aniruddhadevar Carita,* however, gives out an interesting reference as regards the practice of inter-dining. It is narrated that Aniruddha, a Kāyastha by caste, used to cook food and serve meal to all devotees who resided within the satra compound of Gopāla Ātā.[49] But this solitary reference does not prove that inter-dining was actually in vogue. B. C. Allen in his *Census Report of Assam,* 1911, gives out the information that inter-marriage is prevalent amongst certain castes and sub-castes religiously attached to the Māyāmarā branch of the Kāla Śaṁhati. He writes : "The majority of the *Maṭaks* are Ahoms, Chutiyas and Doms, but there are certain members of the Kalitās, Keots and Koches amongst them. All these castes except the Doms inter-marry."[50] This statement of Allen was vigourously contradicted by followers as well as by the head of the Māyāmarā satra. It is a fact that inter-marriage or inter-dining is not prevalent in any of the Vaiṣṇavite sects. But it is also a fact that the Kāla Śaṁhati is more liberal in its attitude towards these social problems. A Brahmin, simply because of his birth, does not receive a higher position or status in their sectarian assemblies than a non-Brahmin.

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[47] *Gopāla Ātā-carita,* p. 255, *Aniruddhadevar Carita* p. 48f.
[48] S. K. Bhuyan (edited) : *Tuṅgkhungīyā Buranji,* p. 61.
[49] C. Goswami : *Aniruddhadevar Carita,* p. 18.
[50] B. C. Allen : *Census Report of Assam, 1911,* p. 34.

The influence of Brahminical rituals has been reduced to a negligible position. According to the *Buranjī-vivekaratna* even the Brahmins affiliated to this sub-sect did not perform the Vedic *sandhyā* or mutter the *gāyatrī-mantra.*[51] The present Brahmin disciples of this Śaṁhati vehemently deny the truth of the above assertion of the *Buranjī-vivekaratna.* The upper class Hindus of this Śaṁhati are seen to observe the Vedic rites even today. The statement of the above work should be accepted with a certain discount. Brahminical rituals have not been uniformly cast off by all sections of its disciples, but the sphere of their influence have been limited to unavaidable rites like theose of marriage and death.

The next feature to be noted is that this Śaṁhati is primarily responsible for bringing to the fold of Vaiṣṇavism the tribals and socially backward communities and thus giving them an opportunity to satisfy their spiritual urge. The practice of initiating woman is absent in this sub-sect. According to this Śaṁhati, Bhakti cannot be cultivated by owning double allegiance to the husband as well as to the Guru.[52]

Lastly, the sub-sect is characterised by the absence of practices of telling beads of rosary and image worship. The Guru is considered to be the image of God and therefore the religious heads of the Māyāmarā satra have been designated as *mūrti* (image). Aniruddhadeva, the founder is called *Ādya-mūrti* (the primal image).

Principal Satras of the Kāla Śaṁhati.

The satras of the Kāla Śaṁhati are mainly confined to central and eastern Assam. The twelve principal disciples of Gopāla Ātā are credited with having founded twelve satras. These are (1) Bāhbārī and Dihing of Bar Yadumaṇi, (2) Māyāmarā of Aniruddha, (3) Gajalā of Saru Yadumaṇi, (4) Āhātaguri of Śrīrāma Ātā, (5) Ikarājān of Rāmacandra, (6) Hāladhiāti of Nārāyaṇa, (7) Nogarīyā of Sanātana, (8) Hābuṅg of Paramānanda, (9) Carāibāhi of Murāri, (10) Kāthpār of Puruṣottama, (11) Daloipo of Sanātana, (12) Khairāmocharā of Rāmacandra.

Of the above mentioned twelve satras, Gajalā, Āhātaguri and Bāhbārī, also known as Dihing, have numerous branches and offshoots. The Māyāmarā satra of Aniruddha has four or five branches, and sons and descendants of Gopal Ātā also established four satras at different places.

III. *PURUṢA SAMHATI*

It is narrated in the biographial literature of this sub-sect that Mādhavadeva declared on more than one occasions that Puruṣottama being the direct descendant of Śaṅkaradeva, would be the real successor to the headship of the order founded by his grandfather ; he (Mādhava) simply acted as an agent during the interim period. That Mādhavadeva actually nominated Puruṣottama Ṭhakur as his successor, as claimed by literature of this sub-sect, is doubtful in view of the fact that earlier biographers like Daityāri, Bhūṣana and Rāmacaraṇa have nowhere mentioned this ; rather they have categorically told that Mādhavadeva did not nominate any body to succeed him. Nevertheless, Purusottama is regarded by the followers of Puruṣa Saṁhati as the real successor of Śaṅkaradeva.

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[51] Maniram Barbhandar Barua : *Buranjī-vivekaratna* (Ms).

[52] This information was supplied by Mohan Chandra Mahanta, the head of Telpāni satra, Jorhat.

Puruṣottama Ṭhākur : Puruṣottama Ṭhākur, from whom the name of the sub-sect originated, was only a boy of six or seven when his grandfather Śaṅkaradeva breathed his last and his father Rāmānanda also died within a year or two after the death of Śaṅkaradeva. Therefore, the early life and education of Puruṣottama were conducted under the guidance of Mādhavadeva.

According to biographer Aniruddha Dāsa, Puruṣottama assumed the role of a *dharmācārya* in the twenty-second year of his life while the family was in his ancestral home at Pātbāusi. From Pātbausi he temporarily shifted to Barnagar the capital of eastern Koch kingdom where he is said to have initiated the wives of king Parīkṣitanārāyaṇa and prince Rūpanārāyaṇa. Thence he again returned to Pātbausi and therefrom again shifted to Javaniyā (modern Jania), a village at a distance of few miles from Barpeta. Here he resided for six years and finally went to Madhupur near Cooch-Behar. There he died in the year 1616 A.D. (1538 *Śakābda*).[53]

Puruṣottama appointed twelve of his principal followers as apostles (*dharmācārya*) to initiate disciples in different parts of central and eastern Assam. These twelve religious heads diffused the teachings of the sub-sect by establishing satras in their own localities.

Besides the acts of propagation through his important disciples, Puruṣottama was also responsible for reviving the eclipsed glory of Śaṅkaradeva. For some time, Śaṅkaradeva's fame was fading owing to activities of over-zealous disciples of Mādhavadeva who placed the latter in the forefront of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism. Puruṣottama proclaimed Śaṅkaradeva as the only Guru of the sect and called the other proselytisers or religious heads as mere representatives or agents of Śaṅkaradeva. He was even reluctant to acknowledge Mādhavadeva as the second Guru of the sect. Religious heads who came after Śaṅkaradeva have been termed as Āchārya and not as Guru. Thus, a separate sub-sect under his leadership developed which owed exclusive allegiance to Śaṅkaradeva. Dvija Bhūṣana, biographer of Śaṅkaradeva and a contemporary of Puruṣottama, speaks of the latter as follows—"Śrīmanta Puruṣottama, the elder brother of Caturbhuja, lived for sometime at Behar. On the eve of his death he summoned all his disciples to his side and asked them to regard as their Guru none else but Śaṅkaradeva."[54] Vidyānanda Ojā, author of *Ṭhākur-carita* categorically supports the view when he says "Know it for certain that Śaṅkaradeva is the only Guru ; there can be no other Guru besides him[55]."

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[53] Aniruddha Das : *Guru-vaṁśāvalī* (MS), verses 141-160.

Caturbhuja Ṭhākur: Puruṣottama at his death-bed nominated his younger brother Caturbhuja Ṭhākur as his successor who was then residing at a place called Gharaśiyā. Caturbhuja Ṭhākur on assuming the role of *dharmācārya* constructed an ideal satra at a place surrounded by the lake Tāmraṅgā in the modern Goalpara district. The writer of *Ṭhākur-carita* compares that satra Viṣṇupura with the city of Dvāraka surrounded on all sides by water. He propagated the faith in both the kingdoms of Kāmarūpa and Cooch-Behar. After some time he, set out for a course of pilgrimage with his family including the wife and daughters of Puruṣottama, as far as Puri. It is stated in the biography written by Vidyānanda Ojhā that five hundred disciples accompanied Caturbhuja in his journey towards Puri. After his return he initiated almost all the princes of both eastern and western branches of the Koch royal dynasty to Vaiṣṇavism.

Like his predecessors, Caturbhuja also nominated twelve principal disciples as religious heads or apostles to preach the tenets of his sub-sect in the Ahom kingdom.

Kanakalatā: About this time his satra at Viṣṇupura was demolished by the invading Muslim army under Abdus Salam in 1635 A.D. After the retreat of the army he reconstructed the satra and then went to the Ganges to immerse his mother's bone. On his way back he died in the year 1648 (Śakābda 1570[56]), nominating his wife Kanakalatā as his successor. Kanakalatā discharged the duties entrusted to her with wonderful success.

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[54] *Śrīmanta puruṣottama āru Caturbhuja* 1
śarīrata bhinna duiro ātmā ekānuja 11
Behār nagare katodina āchilanta 1
bhakatasavaka māti prabodha dilanta 11
śuniyo bhakatasava kaho sāre sāra 1
Śaṅkarata bine guru nedekhibā āra 11
Puruṣottama nāma dhari loka nistārilā 1
Śaṅkarata bine guru āna nakahilā 11
Bhusana Dvija : *Śri-Śaṅkaradeva*, p. 222.

[55] *Śaṅkaradevese guru jānā sāre sāra* 1
Mahāpuruṣata pare guru nāhi āra 11
Vidyānanda Ojhā : *Ṭhakur-carita* verse 446.

[56] According Aniruddha who was a contemporary of Ramākānta, grandson of Caturbhuja, the dates of birth and death of Caturbhuja are Śakābda 1517 and 1570 respectively. The dates given by Aniruddha probably are correct in view of the fact that he lived in the Vaikuṇṭhapura satra established by Caturbhuja himself.

After a few years of her husband's death, she left Viṣṇupura satra of her husband for Bardowā the ancestral place of Śaṅkaradeva. But unable to trace the exact location of the ancestral home she remained at a place which subsequently came to be known as Āi-bheṭi (literally, mother's place.). A few years later she again moved further east and settled for four years at a place known as Cinātali. Thence she returned again to central Assam where she died in the year 1668 (1590 Śaka).[57] Kanakalatā also selected twelve of her prominent disciples to carry on the work of the sect in different parts of Assam. She was a resourceful lady having a strong personality and religious acumen. She not only maintained the revived glory and reputation of the family of Śaṅkaradeva, but greatly contributed towards radiating its refulgence by discovering and reclaiming Bardowā, the ancestral seat of Śaṅkaradeva.

Latter history: With the passing away of Kanakalatā, the last notable religious personality of the Puruṣa Saṁhati ended. After her, the line of religious headship descending from Śaṅkaradeva bifurcated itself into two branches— the one connected with Puruṣottama and the other with Caturbhuja. Both Puruṣottama and Caturbhuja died without any male issue. Puruṣottama's three grandsons through his daughter established three satras in eastern Assam. Caturbhuja had three wives. By his first wife Kanakalatā, already mentioned, he had a daughter Subhadrā and the latter's son Anantarāya and his descendants established several satras in eastern and central Assam. Kowamarā and Śalaguri founded by Anantarāya are the most important satras of this branch. The sons and grandsons of Sumitrā, another daughter of Caturbhuja, continued to occupy the headship of Viṣṇupura satra originally established by Caturbhuja in western Assam.

Dāmodara Ātā, nephew of Caturbhuja (according to some biographical literature of this sub-sect, Dāmodara Ātā was Caturubhuja's adopted son)[58] also left western Assam owing to frequent troubles created by the Muslims and ultimately succeeded in receiving the favour of the Ahom king Jayadhvaja Siṁha (1648-1663 A.D.) Japadhvaja Siṁha by a liberal grant of land and money helped him to establish a satra temporarily at North Lakhīmpur, which subsequently acquired the name Narowā satra. According to some accounts, Narowā satra in North Lakhīmpur was established during the reign of Chakradhvaja Siṁha (1663-69) and it was actually founded by Ramākānta, son of Dāmodara Ātā. Any way, the satra traces the genealogy of its headship to Dāmodara Ātā. After staying and propagating a few years in eastern Assam, Dāmodara Ātā returned to central Assam to trace the original position at Bardowā where Śaṅkaradeva lived and preached during the early period of his life. He succeeded in tracing it in collaboration with Kanakalatā and permanently established a satra which henceforth came to be known as Bardowā satra. In course of time, the two main satras, viz., Narowā and Bardowā established by Dāmodara Ātā became two of the leading satras of the Puruṣa Saṁhati. Dāmodara died between 1655 and 1662 A.D.[59]

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[57] Ramākanta Muktiyār (edited) : *Āi Kanakalataā-carita*, p. 90.

[58] *The Kāyastha Samājar Itivṛtta* compiled by H. N. Datta Barua, quotes a few lines from a biography written by one Ratikānta Dvija, wherein Caturbhuja is described to have adopted his sister's son Dāmodara as his son (vide, *Kāyastha Samājar itivṛitta*, p. 234).

When Dāmodara Ātā died, his son Ramākānta was a boy of four years. The Bardowā satra became a bone of contention between Ramākānta and Anantarāya, son of Kanakalatā. In the mean time, the invasion and victorious march of Mir-zumla in 1662, brought about a state of instability to the Bardowā satra also. Both Ramākānta and Anantarāya moved towards eastern Assam in order to avoid Muslim oppression. When peace was restored, they did not come back to Bardowā. King Chakradhvaja Siṁha patronised them and helped to establish themselves in eastern Assam. Ramākānta reclaimed the site where his father Dāmodara Ātā had once temporarily settled and established a satra which came to be known as Narowa. Anantarāya, on the other hand, founded two more satras in the present Sibsagar district which later on assumed importance as Kowāmarā and Śalaguri.

The satra at Bardowā, reclaimed by Dāmodara Ātā and Kanakalatā a few years before, was managed jointly by the descendants of Ramākānta and Anantarāya respectively. But towards the end of the eighteenth century an internecine quarrel between the two families brough the satra to the verge of ruin. At long last, a settlement was reached through the intervention of the royal court and the satra was equally divided between the two families descending from Ramākānta and Anantarāya. Two more satras viz., Cāmaguri and Dīghalī, claiming affiliation with Puruṣottama, grandson of Śaṅkaradeva, sprang up. Puruṣottama had no son, but a few daughters. His two grandsons Cakrapāṇi and Śarangapāṇi by his daughter Keśavapriyā managed to secure patronage from the Ahom king Cakradhvaja Siṁha. As a result, Cakrapāṇi established Cāmaguri satra in 1663 (1558 Saka) in the Sibsagar district from which several offshoots and branches later on developed. Śārangapāṇi founded Dīghalī satra which also branched off later on.

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[59] The mediæval biographer Aniruddha gives the date of Dāmodara Ātā's death as Śakābda 1577 (1655 A.D.), while *the Kāyastha Samājar Itivṛtta* gives the date as 1584 (1662) without informing the source.

With the establishment of above satras with their offshoots and branches, the history of Puruṣa Saṁhati practically comes to an end. The subsequent history is stale and lifeless.

Characteristics: According to the Vaiṣṇavite tradition, the Puruṣa Saṁmati lays special emphasis on Nāma which is one of the four fundamental elements in the practice of devotion. Chanting, and singing in praise of God and meditating on His various names and forms are considered acts of special merit according to this sub-sect. This is why the satras of this sub-sect developed various ways and modes of singing or chanting congregational prayers, such as *pāl-nāma* (chanting prayers in succession throughout night), *uthā-nāma* (chanting of prayers with rhythmic movements in standing posture) etc. The followers of this sub-sect observe Brahminical rites and in most of the satras affiliated to this sub-sect images of Viṣṇu are to be found. In fact Puruṣottama plainly expressed once before Vaṁśigopāladeva thus: "Those who do not recognise the *Gītā, Bhāgavata,* images of Viṣṇu and Brahmins and do not perform *śrāddhas* are the offenders of Mahāpuruṣīya cult".[60] Thus, though it lays special emphasis on Nāma, it does not deny the necessity of image-worship and Brahminical rites. Viewed from this point, the gulf of difference between the Puruṣa and the Brahma Saṁhatis is very narrow. The image worship and the Brahminical rites are more prominent in the latter while in the former it is not so. Another noteworthy feature is that the sub-sect does not recognise Mādhavadeva as of equal footing with Śaṅkaradeva. The position of Śaṅkaradeva is unique in the hierarchy of religious saints.

Principal satras of the Puruṣa Saṁhati

Principal satras affiliated to the Puruṣa Saṁhati are grouped under three categories:—(i) *Bar-bārajanīyā* satras i.e., satras established by the twelve Principal disciples of Puruṣottama Ṭhākur, (ii) *Saru-bārajanīyā* satras i.e. satras established by twentyfour disciples of Caturbhuja Ṭhākur and his wife Kanakalatā. The former group is called *Bar-bārajanīyā* or senior twelve satras because the founders of these satras received initiation and inspiration from Puruṣottama Ṭhākur who was the senior of the two grandsons of Śaṅkaradeva. The latter group is called *Saru-bārajanīyā* because of its affiliation to the junior grandson (Caturbhuja) of Śaṅkaradeva. The third group is called *Nāti* (grandsons) satras i.e., satras founded by great-grandsons of Śaṅkaradeva.

(I) *Bar-bārajanīyā satras:*—(1) Kurcuṅg (Keśava Bhāgatī), (2) Cekerātali (Gopīnātha), (3) Catamiyā (Vāsudeva), (4) Gomoṭhā

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[60] Ramānanda : *Vaṁśigopāladevar Carita,* p. 140.

(Rāmakṛṣṇa), (5) Puniyā (Paraśurāma), (6) Elengi (Bāpu-Kṛṣṇa), (7) Ratanpur (Paramānanda), (8) Sāud-kuchi (Haricaraṇa), (9) Kāṭhpar (Kamala-locana), (10) Beṅgenā-āṭi (Murāri), (11) Cupahā (Kṛṣṇacarana), (12) Ṭhakariyāl (Kamalalocana).

(II) *Saru-bārajanīyā satra :* Satras established by disciples of Caturbhuja Ṭhakur are (1) Bargāon (Deurām), (2) Ghar-katiyā (Jaya-kṛṣṇna), (3) Gobhīr (Jaykānāi), (4) Kāwaimāri (Gopinātha), (5) Hāladhi-āti (Mukunda), (6) Śalaguri (Ratnākara), (7) Bihampur (Govinda), (8) Nācanipārā (Rāmabhandra), (9) Bhandulāi (Viṣṇudeva), (10) Cuṅgā-pārā (Kānai), (11) Uzaniyāl (Kanu), (12) Belśidhiyā (Sanātana).

Satras established by disciples of Kanakalatā are (1) Kaupāti (Rāmacarana), (2) Nācpār (Ramaśobhana), (3) Nalatīyā (Gopikānta), (4) Nepāli (Ratikānta), (5) Lakhīpur (Raghupati), (6) Karatipār (Hari-gati), (7) Kāthargrām (Paramānanda), (8) Kamalābāri (Gopala), (9) Pohārdiyā (Kṛṣṇagrahan), (10) Gatamṭyā (Jayagovinda), (11) Micimi (Haricarana), (12) Śālmarīyā (Kṛṣṇa).*

(III) *Nāti satras :* Viṣṇpura (Caturbhuja Ṭhākur), Bardowā (Dāmodara), Narowā (Ramākānta), Kowamarā (Anantarāya), Dighalī (Śāraṅgapāni), Cāmaguri (Cakrapāṇi).

Each of the above satras has several branches.

IV—*NIKĀ OR NITYA SAMHATI*

The Nikā Saṁhati seems to have taken shape after the formation of other three sub-sects. The tradition current amongst the Vaiṣṇavas also support this view. The very name *Nikā* (pure, clean) points to the conclusion that it originated immediately after the formation of other three sub-sects. The necessity of organizing a cleaner sect arose when other sub-sects appeared to have gone somewhat astray from the original path chalked out by the first two Gurus. Therefore, Padma Ātā who was the youngest of Mādhavadeva's chief disciples and who was also saddled with the responsibility of the religious headship in eastern Assam, thought it necessary to evolve a proper code of conducts for the Vaiṣṇavas. He got immediate response from Mathurādāsa of the Barpetā satra who was also no less anxious to purify the sect by laying stringent rules and conduct of life. They were also helped in this act by Keśava Ātā, a close companion of Padma Ātā throughout the latter's religious career. These three, viz., Padma Ātā, Mathurā Ātā and Keśava Ātā may be considered the trio of the Nikā Saṁhati.

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* Names included in brackets are those of founders.

Mathurādasa was the eldest of the three. His original name was Gopāla and is said to have professed Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism before he met Mādhavadeva. His name was changed to Mathurādāsa after his conversion to the Śaṅkarite Vaiṣṇavism of Assam. Within a short time of his conversion he become one of the most trusted disciples of Mādhavadeva, so much so that on the eve of Mādhavadeva's departure from Kāmarūpa to Cooch-Behar, Mathurādāsa was nominated to the seniorship of the Barpetā satra.[61]

Mathurādāsa was an able organiser and an unflinching devotee. He reconstructed the satra and systematised its management after the original constructions of the satra built by Mādhavadeva were reduced to ashes as the result of a devastating fire. The democratic procedure of managing the affairs of the satra so prominent in the present Barpetā satra was initially introduced by Mathurādāsa Buḍhā Ātā. Under his able stewardship Barpetā satra became the radiating centre of the Mahāpuruṣīya Vaiṣṇavism.

Keśava Ātā and Padma Ātā: Keśava Ātā was next to Mathurādāsa in age. He hailed from the easternmost part of Assam and became a disciple of Mādhavadeva when the latter was at Barpetā. Het met Padma Ātā on his way back home at Nārāyaṇapura and being very much impressed by his devotional bent of mind, advised Padma Ātā, who was still uninitiated, to proceed to Kāmarūpa where he would meet Mādhavadeva. The young man requested Keśava Ātā to escort him to Mādhavadeva, to which he readily agreed. Accordingly, after a few days, they started by the river Brahmaputra for Barpetā, but unfortunately Mādhavadeva had already left for Cooch-Behar. So Padma Ātā ultimately met Mādhavadeva at Bhelā (Cooch-Behar) where he receeived necessary religious training and ordination from Mādhavadeva in due course. Both of them came back to eastern Assam and having preached the religion at several places ultimately established a satra known as Kamalābārī within the island of the Brahmaputra. Within a short time of its establishment, it became one of the prominent satras of eastern Assam. Padma Ātā is also known as Badalā Ātā, as he was sent to eastern Assam by Mādhavadeva on his behalf (*badal*=exchange, on behalf). It is further narrated in *carita-puthis* that Mādhava clearly demarcated the geographical jurisdiction over which the religious influence of Mathurādāsa, Padma Ātā and himself would hold sway. According to this demarcation, the eastern and central Assam came under the jurisdiction of Padma Ātā, Kāmarūpa and Goālpārā under Mathuradāsa and Cooch-Behar remained under Mādhava's direct control.[62] Keśava Ātā subsequently established a satra of his own which came to be known as Barjahā satra.

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[61] *Daityāri* : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita*, pp. 185, 241.

[62] *Kathā-guru-carita*, p. 532.

Besides Mathurādāsa, Keśava Ātā and Padma Ātā, another person to be taken into consideration in dealing with the development of Nikā Saṁhati is Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur, nephew of Mādhavadeva. He had been a constant companion of his maternal uncle and helped him in all possible ways. After the departure of Mādhavadeva to Cooch-Behar he became the head of Sundaridīyā and Ganakkuchi satras originally established by Mādhavadeva. His sons and grandsons also contributed towards the spread of Vaiṣṇavism by establishing several satras in western Assam. Rāmacaraṇa is also credited with several literary and devotional compositions. a few scores of devotional songs, two plays, (*Kaṁsabadha* and *Nṛsiṁha yātrā*) and metrical translation of Śaṅkaradeva's Sanskrit work *Bhaktiratnākara*. He also collected the different parts of Śaṅkaradeva's *Kīrtana* which were lying scattered in different parts of Assam.

There is nothing very much noteworthy in the history of Nikā Saṁhati after the passing away of the above personalities.

Characteristics: These three apostles, viz., Mathurādāsa, Padma Ātā and Keśava Ātā evolved a set of conducts and rules for their followers which were meant to purify Vaiṣṇavas in body and mind. For its exclusive attention to cleanliness of mind and body, the sub-sect came to be known as *Nikā*, (M.I.A.—*nikka*) i.e., pure. The followers of this sub-sect are required to observe strict discipline in respect of food, dress and manners and in all religious matters. They never partake food prepared by others, never take even a betel-nut without taking bath and never put on a piece of cloth that has not been washed or dipped in water daily. Even fuel is sprinkled with water before it is actually put into fire. Similar stringent rules are noticed in other spheres also. These conducts of every-day life are uniformly followed in all satras affiliated to the Nikā Saṁhati.[63]

The sub-sect had certain religious characteristics which also deserve notice. This sub-sect lays special emphasis on serving holy association (*sat-saṅga*). The second noticeable feature of this section is that its followers consider Mādhava as the Guru of the sect, while Śaṅkaradeva is regarded as the Guru of their Guru and as such, their relation with Mādhavadeva is immediate and that with Śaṅkaradeva is indirect. Every neophyte of this sub-sect is required to owe allegiance to the name of Mādhavadeva.[64] Thus the position of Mādhavadeva is more important than that of Śaṅkaradeva in their religious hiearchy. The sub-sect is further characterised by a negative attitude towards the practice of image worship. The worship of the scripture is a marked feature. Though this characteristic of worshipping a scripture is also present in the Puruṣa and the Kāla Saṁhatis, it is more prominent in the Nikā.

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[63] M. Barbhāṇḍar Barua : *Buranji-vivekaratna*, (transcript No. XII, D.H.A.S., (Gauhati).

[64] Ibid.

Principal Satras of the Nikā Saṁhati: The most influential satra affiliated to the Nikā Saṁhati in western Assam is Barpeta established by Mādhavadeva. The other important satras in western Assam are Sundarīyā, Camariyā, Dhopguri and Khaṭarā founded respectively by Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur, Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā, Laksmīkānta and Govinda Ātā. Founders of above satras were disciples of Mādhavadeva.

In eastern Assam principal Satras affiliated to this Saṁhati are Kamalābārī and Barjahā founded by Badalā Ātā and Keśava Ātā respectively.

Relation between the sub-sects: The sub-sects detailed in the preceding pages, created a net-work of satras throughout the entire Brahmaputra valley, and practically converted more than half of its population to Vaiṣṇavism. Excepting a brief period of twenty years between 1770-1790 in which the Māyāmariyā sect in a fit of religious frenzy and political intoxication tried to dominate over the followers of other sub-sects, the history has not mentioned any friction between the different sub-sects of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. Rather, a spirit of co-operation and harmony marked the relation between the different sub-sects throughout the history of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam.

It cannot, however, be denied that there are a few spurious biographical works written in the names of Mādhavadeva, Bhaṭṭadeva, and Kṛṣṇa-Bhāratī in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of the Christian era; they contain vilification against Vaiṣṇavite saints of opposite subsects. *Ādi-carita, Sat-sampradāya-kathā,* and *Santanirṇaya,* for example, supposed to be written by Mādhavadeva, Bhaṭṭadeva and Kṛṣṇa Bhāratī respectively, contain sectarian vilification which is usually rare in the earlier biographical literature. But its effect on the relation of the sub-sects was negligible. Satras of different subsects expanded and thrived side by side without mutual antagonism.

It must be said that the rapid and mushroom growth of satras had its darker sides also. But the merits of the institution which contributed so much to the religious and culural development of Assam, out-weigh the demerits. The details of its nature, its contribution and defects have been discussed in the succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER V

THE NATURE, ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SATRA INSTITUTION

The special feature of Assam Vaiṣṇavism is the satra institution. It is an institution resembling, to a certain extent, the Buddhist monastery system or the *matha* institution of the medieval period. Before we proceed to deal with its origin and development, we should give a clear account of the nature and characteristics of the institution as obtained today.

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STRUCTURAL FEATURE

Satras are generally situated on quadrangles surrounded by palisades or walls. Each principal satra is marked by the existence of a *nāmaghar*, a *maṇikuta*, a *bātcarā* and two or four rows of *hāṭis*. Details of these structures are noted below.

Nāmaghar : The centre of the main activities of a satra is the *nāmaghar*. It is a large open hall with gabled roof having an apsidal facade. The *nāmaghar* serves the purpose of a prayer hall as well as a hall for holding religious meetings and discussions. A *nāmaghar* of the ancient type (a modern nāmaghar is simply an open rectangular hall) consists of a nave and side-aisles having rows of wooden pillars separating the nave from the aisles. The size of *nàmaghar* may vary according to the number of disciples it has to accommodate.

The existence of *nāmaghar* is not confined to the satra alone. It is a common feature of Assamese villages also. In addition to serving as the common prayer hall in the villages it also serves as a stage for dramatic performance and a venue of village pañcāyets.

Maṇikūṭa : The actual shrine where the idol of the deity or the sacred scripture is kept, is called *maṇikūṭa.* It is a smaller structure than the *nāmaghar* and is generally attached to the latter adjoining the eastern end. In addition to the idol and sacred scriptures, all the precious things dedicated to the deity are kept in the *maṇikūṭa.* It is the *sanctum-sanctorum* of the entire establishment and as all the valuables and jewels of the satra including the sacred idol are kept and preserved here, it is called *maṇikūṭa,* literally the house of jewels.

In a separate house adjacent to the *maṇikūṭa,* relics of the early reformers are being preserved in some satras. It is commonly known as *pada-śilā-ghar,* because it usually contains foot-impressions or foot-wears of some early saints or religious heads. Unlike the *nāmaghar,* the *maṇikūṭa* or the *pada-śilā-ghar* is not open to all.

Hāṭī: Centering round the *maṇikūṭa* and the *nāmaghar* exist four rows (sometimes two) of residential huts intended for clerical devotees. These four rows of huts are known as *cāri-hāṭi.* The word *hāṭi* is derived from Sanskrit *haṭṭa,* meaning a market or a fair. To each devotee is allotted a hut consisting one or more rooms according to his status and need.

Minor satras, where monastic life is not observed, could hardly be distinguished from ordinary households. Such minor satras could be identified as such only for the existence of the *nāmaghar* and the *maṇikūṭa.* The system of *cāri-haṭi* is rarely noticed there.

Bāṭcorā: The entrance leading to the interior of a satra is usually marked by a small open house known as *bāṭcarā* or *karāpāṭ.* It functions as the gate-house. Distinguished guests are first received at the *bāṭcarā* and then they are escorted to the interior of the satra.

Satra and thān: Although the word *thān* is used loosely to mean any place of public worship, it has a special connotation amongst the Vaisnavite circle. The places where the principal apostles of Assamese Vaisnavism worked and died and where some of their relics have been preserved are called *thān* (Skt. *sthāna*). Therefore, those satras which have been preserving some relics of the early saints are also called *thān.* In Kāla Saṁhati, the places of cremation of religious heads are also called *thān* or *agnithān* by the disciples.

Description of a modern satra: The following account of the Garamūr satra as given in the *District Gazetteer of Sibsagar,* 1905, may be taken as a representative description of the principal monastic satras of Assam.

"The buildings of the satra are approached by a good road which is constructed at some expense. The nāmaghar is a huge structure, the roof of which is supported on huge wooden pillars and the great floor-space is entirely bare save for one or two lecturns on which the sacred writings are reposing. The actual shrine is a separate building closely adjoining the eastern end of the nāmaghar. The shrine is very different from the penetralia of the Śākta temple. There is no trace of blood or grease; there is nothing disgusting or grotesque and the whole place is dominated by the note of decency and propriety which is so marked a characteristic of Vaiṣṇavism of Majuli. In a square around the gardens stand the lines of huts in which the resident monks live. They consist of well-built rows of rooms which are much more spacious than those ordinarily occupied by village folk and are kept scrupulously clean. There is singularly gracious and pleasing in the whole atmosphere. Everything is fresh, neat and well-to-do. The well-groomed smiling monks are evidently at peace with themselves and with the world at large and even little boys that flock around them are unusually clean and well-behaved. The children are recruited from the villages and trained to be devotees, but if at any time they find the restraint of celibacy irksome they are at liberty to return to the outer world."[1]

Parties attached to the satra: Each satra consists of three principal parties, viz., (i) *adhikāra* and *dekā-adhikāra,* (ii) *bhakat,* (iii) *siṣya.* The first two parties generally reside within the four walls of the satra campus and the last viz., the *sisyas* live in villages outside the satra leading householder's life.

(i) *Adhikāra* and *dekā-adhikāra:* The head of a satra is popularly known as *adhikāra or satriyā.* His position is similar to that of the mohunt of medieval mathas or the abbot of the Christian monastic system. He is the religious head and spiritual guide of the flock under his care. The formal initiation ceremony *śaraṇa* and the confirmatory *bhajana* are conducted under his direct supervision. Next to *adhikāra* in power and prestige is *dekā-adhikāra* who usually becomes the head after the demise of the *adhikāra.* When the *adhikāra* remains absent or goes out on a tour the *dekā-adhikāra* performs the duties of the head.

(ii) *Bhakat:* Though the term *bhakat* (Sk. *bhakta*) means any devotee, yet it is popularly applied to mean those devotees who either hold ecclesiastical office of the satra or lead the life of a celibate within the satra campus. In monastic satras where celibacy is strictly observed, the number of such celibate devotees is more numerous than those of *gṛhasthī* satras. Such unmarried devotees are called *kavaliyā-bhakat.* The word *kevaliyā* is derived from Sanskrit *kevala* (lone). Celibate devotees are recruited in their early years by elderly celibates and under guidance and supervision of the latter they remain as apprentices for a few years. When they are sufficiently acquainted with the religious tenets and practices they are formally initiated to the religious order. These apprentices are to wait upon their superiors and receive religious lessons from them.

(iii) *Śiṣya:* Lay devotees or disciples of a satra are called *śiṣyas.* They generally live in villages and towns leading householder's life. Every Vaiṣṇava householder in Assam belonging to the Assamese community, is invariably affiliated to one or the other of the satras of Assam. Customarily every Assamese young man of the Vaiṣṇava families must have his initiation before he gets himself married. Formerly this custom was obligatory and an uninitiated young man was not allowed to take active part in religious functions.

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[1] *District Gazetteers of Assam,* (Sibsagar) p. 95f.

The satra institution is thus a religious community having three parties and having a definite location with certain structural characteristics.

ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION

Having given an account of the nature of the present satra institution, we now proceed to deal with the origin and the process of its evolution.

Use of the word satra: The use of the term satra in the sense of a Vaiṣṇava institution or establishment appears altogether to be a new one in the religious history of India. The word satra is a corrupt form of the Sanskrit word *sattra.* In Sanskrit literature the word has been used in two senses, firstly, in the sense of an alms-house and secondly, in the sense of a sacrifice lasting from a few days to a year or more.[2] The latter sense is responsible for lending the nomenclature to the Vaiṣṇavite institution of Assam.

In the opening chapter of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* the word *sattra* has been used to denote a long session of sacrifice of a thousand years' duration performed by sages in the forest of Nimiṣā. In course of the sacrificial session Suta-Ugraśravā recited and explained the entire *Bhāgavata-purāna* to the assembled sages. This process of reciting and listening to the exposition of the *Bhāgavata* most probably gave currency to the word *sattra* in Assam. Śaṇkaradeva probably initiated his movement by reciting and expounding stories from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa,* to a band of followers who clustered around him to listen to his religious discourses. The part played by Śaṅkaradeva reminded the listeners of the part played by Suta-Ugraśravā in the assembly of holy sages in the forest of Nimisā. The fact that a sacrificial session known as *sattra* proceeded concurrently with the act of expounding the *Bhāgavata,* easily led people to believe that a *sattra* and a holy association where the *Bhāgavata* used to be discussed were identical. Under this impression devotees began to term an assembly where the *Bhāgavata* used to be recited as a *sattra.* The etymological meaning of the word which means an association or a sitting (√sad + tra) or an instrument which helps to liberate the noble (sat + √trai) must have supplied additional weight to form the above notion about *sattra.* The word *sattra* very naturally became *satra* in Assamese.

In the initial stage of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement the word *satra* was used in the sense of a religious sitting or association and not a systematized institution. Ananta Kandali, a contemporary of Śaṅkaradeva while tracing the genealogy of his family in his translation of Book IV of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* speaks of his father Ratna Pāthaka as having founded a satra at Hajo where he constantly recited the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa.* By the use of the term satra, Ananta Kandali most probably refers to a religious sitting or association where his father used to explain the *Bhāgavata,* because the satra in the shape of a monastic or semi-monastic institution developed much later than Ratna Pāthaka. Bhusana Dvija, one of the earliest biographers of Śaṅkaradeva has used the word *satra-gṛha* in the sense of a house where Śaṅkaradeva immediately after his return from the first pilgrimage used to hold religious discussion.[3]

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[2] P. V. Kane : *History of Dharmasastras,* vol. II, Part II, pp. 12, 39.

Bhaṭṭadeva, one of the foremost religious teacher of the sixteenth century, defines a satra in his *Śaraṇa-mālikā* as an assembly of holy persons where Bhakti in all its aspects is practised. He defines: "That supreme place adored by gods and Vaiṣṇavas, where ardent devotees perform duties pleasing to God and where ninefold Bhakti daily prevails, is called satra: Vaiṣṇavas residing there are naturally prone to *Harināma.*"[4]

Thus, we find that a religious sitting or association where the *Bhāgavata* was recited or explained was designated as a satra at the initial stage of the Vaiṣṇava movement. With the progress of time, these associations of devotees began to develop on a distinct line and ultimately emerged as a well-developed institution having a distinct structural feature and an elaborate paraphernalia and practices. Henceforth, the term satra began to signify a distinct type of institution with characteristics of its own.

Stages of Evolution: The first stage naturally began with Śaṅkaradeva. But in his times the religious association organised by him did not take the shape of a regular institution of a permanent nature. That there was no satra of a permanent nature during his times, can be inferred from the fact that Mādhavadeva who succeeded Śaṅkaradeva as the head of the sect did not become the head of any satra left by Śaṅkaradeva. He rather conducted the affairs of the sect by staying first at Ganak-kuchi and later at Sundarīdiyā. On the other hand, the family of Śaṅkaradeva, as the *carita-puthis* state, had to pass through embarrassing financial circumstances and Mādhavadeva had to come on a few occasions to its help.[5] Had there been a permanent satra presided over by Śaṅkaradeva, his family after him would not have fallen in such a financial strait.

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[3] Bhūṣana Dvija : *Śrī-Śaṅkaradeva* : verse, 157, & Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carita,* verse 2051, p. 161.

[4] Quoted by Ramdeva Goswami in his introduction to *Prasaṅga-mālā* by Bhaṭṭadeva.

Yatrācaranti saddharmān kevalā Bhagavata-priyāh
navadhā bhagavadbhaktih pratyahaṁ yatra varttate.
tad-sattraṁ uttamaṁ kṣetraṁ vaiṣṇava-sura-vanditaṁ
tatrasthā-vaiṣṇavāḥ sarve harināma parayaṇāḥ.

[5] Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carita,* pp. 309, 313 ; *Kathā-gurucarita* p. 393ff.

Insecurity and temporary nature of his stay at different places perhaps prevented Śaṅkaradeva from organising the infant institution on a permanent and systematic basis.

It is not known from biographical or contemporary literature of the period whether the satra of Śaṅkaradeva besides containing the prayer-hall and the shrine did really contain the system of *cārī-hāṭi* (cloisters for monks) like that of later-day satras. Probably Śaṅkaradeva's satra consisted of a prayer-hall and a few huts for devotees who preferred to remain in close proximity to him. Absence of the system of *cārī-hāṭi* can be inferred from the fact that there were neither administrative functionaries to manage the affairs of the *cārī-hāṭi,* nor was there any common storehouse to maintain the inmates thereof. Had there been such a system, Mādhavadeva, a celibate, would not have resided with his brother-in-law, Rāmadāsa who lived at a distance of few miles from Śaṅkaradeva's residence. Even the existence of the shrine (*maṇikūṭa)* is doubtful. We do not come across the word *maṇikūṭa* in any of the early biographies of Śaṅkaradeva. The biographies of the eighteenth century, notably *Katha-gurucarita,* speak of the existence of *cārī-hāṭi* and *maṇikūṭa*;[6] but the early biographers like Bhuṣana Dvija and Rāmacaraṇa have not referred to the existence of *maṇikūṭa* or *cārī-hāṭi.* They have used the word *deva-gṛha* or *deva-mandira* which may mean the prayer-hall as well. The *maṇikūṭa* became a necessary part of the satra-structure when the system of installing an image of the deity or of a sacred scripture came into vogue.

It was in the time of Dāmodaradeva and Mādhavadeva that the satra institution attained the second phase of its growth. There are definite references in biographies to the part played by Dāmodaradeva and Mādhavadeva in shaping the structural feature of the satra institution. In this respect Dāmodaradeva's contribution seems to be more striking. Rāmarāya, biographer of Dāmodaradeva who wrote his work *Gurulīlā* in the second quarter of the seventeenth century gives a graphic account of the satra of Dāmodaradeva at Cooch-Behar. His account of the satra of Dāmodaradeva at Cooch-Behar, therefore, carries some weight. The Bhitaruādhāp satra which later on came to be known as Vaikuṇṭhapura, according to Rāmarāya, consisted of a shrine and a large prayer-hall well-decorated with various designs and carvings and surrounded by four rows of systematically constructed huts (*cārī-hāṭi*). The boundary of the satra was demarcated by high palisades. The satra contained a separate rows of huts outside the palisades for married disciples. There was also a gate-house with a tower over it.[7]

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[6] *Kathā-gurucarita,* p. 34.

[7] Rāmrāya Dvija : *Gurulīlā,* p. 159f.

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That Dāmodaradeva did something noteworthy towards the growth of the satra is also borne out by an evidence furnished by the biographies of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. According to Rāmacarana, Daityāri and the author of *Kathā-gurucarita,* Mādhavadeva planned and built the satra at Barpeta on the lines of the satra of Dāmodaradeva at Patbausi. It is stated by Rāmacarana Ṭhākur that after the demise of Śaṅkaradeva, the people of Barpetā and its surrounding areas were very much attracted by the satra of Dāmodaradeva at Pātbausi with its imposing structures where religious performances were frequently held. Nārāyaṅa Ṭhākur, an old colleague and disciple of Śaṅkaradeva advised Mādhavadeva, who now headed the religious order, to plan and construct a satra at Barpetā with a view to counteracting the move of Dāmodaradeva. Mādhavadeva, by nature averse to ostentation, at first showed his disinclination towards the suggestion of Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākur, but later on deemed it necessary to reconstruct the Barpetā satra in a planned and attractive manner. The prayer-hall was tastefully decorated with various designs and carvings. The lines of huts for celibates were also properly arranged.[8] Both Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva were celibates therefore, the satra institution under them took a monastic turn. According to *Kathā-gurucarita* there were one hundred and twenty celibate devotees within the campus of the Barpetā satra during the times of Mādhavadeva.[9] According to Rāmarāya more than a hundred celibates accompanied Dāmodaradeva to Cooch-Behar.[10]

The structural feature of the satra also received the final shape during this period. The prayer-hall *(nāmaghar)* and the shrine *(maṇikuṭa)* attached to the former were perhaps modelled on the structural pattern of a Hindu temple which consists of a *garbha-gṛha* containing image of a deity and a *maṇḍapa* hall. The apsidal *nāmaghar* attached to the *maṇikuṭa* exactly resembles an apsidal *maṇḍapa* attached to the *garbha-gṛha.* The main temple of Kāmākhyā has a similar apsidal *maṇḍapa* adjoined to the main shrine. Similar temples with apsidal *maṇḍpa* are olso found elsewhere in India.[11] The *bāṭcarā* of a satra is a miniature imitation of *toraṇagṛha* of the Hindu temple. The quadrangle on which the temple of Jagannātha at Puri is situated, having residental quarters of sevaites on the four sides, may have influenced the reformers to build their satra on the same model.

The final phase of the evolution was attained with the extension of royal patronage to the satras in the second half of the seventeenth century which placed the satras on a sound economic footing. During this period also, the headship of the satra began to devolve on the hereditary line. The influence of the royal court in the management of the satra as well as in observance of its formalities and dealings is also noticed. Details of the courtly influence will be dealt with in the next section.

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[8] Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carita* p. 310f ; *Kathā-Gurucarita,* pp. 349-356. *Ṭhakur-Atar Carita,* p. 186f.

[9] *Kathā-gurucarita,* pp. 357, 362.

[10] Rāmarāya : *Gurulīlā,* p. 131.

[11] O. C. Ganguli : *Indian Architecture,* p. 24, (plate No. 39).

MANAGEMENT OF THE SATRA

The management of a satra is run by the *adhikāra* with the help of a number of functionaries attached to different departments of the satra. Before we go to the details of the present-day administrative system of satras, a historical survey of this aspect of the satra will be helpful for a proper understanding of the institution.

Early management : At the initial stage of the movement when the satra institution was in the formative stage, the office of the *adhikāra* or of a set of functionaries with various duties in the satra as well as in villages could not be expected to have existed. As the number of disciples were very limited and business that had to be transacted was simple, the number of functionaries were, therefore, very much smaller than that of a later-day satra. Few functionaries that existed during the time of Śaṅkaradeva were mainly concerned with the management of prayer-services. During this period devotees residing in huts near-about the prayer-hall of Śaṅkaradeva had to maintain themselves by procuring food-stuff from their home or by begging alms.[12] From the biographies we do not get any reference to the existence of a common store-house or treasury. There was no provision for a regular income and therefore, the infant institution had to depend on voluntary gifts and presents from sympathisers for its maintenance.

The organizational side of the satra institution improved a lot during the tenure of Mādhavadeva and Dāmodardeva. Besides reconstructing the Barpetā satra on a permanent basis Mādhavadeva systematically divided the prayer-services into fourteen units.[13] He placed some of his faithful disciples in charge of different units of prayer-services. One of his faithful disciples viz., Manpur was placed in charge of the store house. As stated in *Kathā-gurucarita,* Mādhavadeva for the first time introduced the system of *sidhā-bhojani* according to which every householder was required to contribute food-stuff according to his capacity whenever he visited the satra.[14] Though he did not introduce the system of paying tithe amongst his disciples, yet, according to *Kathā-gurucarita* he advised disciples to set apart one-third of their income for religious purpose and further advised the proselytisers working at different places to visit at least once a year his satra at Barpetā with necessary contributions.[15]

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[12] *Kathā-gurucarita,* pp. 146, 275, 302, 386.

[13] Ibid, p. 1.

He is said to have introduced strict monastic rules amongst his celibate disciples. Celibate disciples remaining within the campus of the satras were not allowed to stay outside, at night, without previous permission. Even separate bathing arrangements were made for celibates and non-celibates in the Barpeta lake.[16] When he left for Cooch-Behar the management of the Barpet satra, was left under the collective authority of devotees who nominated Mathurādāsa as the leader of the community of devotees.[17]

Simultaneously with Mādhavadeva, Dāmodaradeva also systematised the management of his satra by allotting definite function to different individuals. He appointed three *bhāgavatīs* to recite the *Bhāgavata* at morning, after-noon, and evening. Another devotee was placed in charge of the store-house with twelve others as his assistants.[18] According to Nīlakaṇṭha Dāsa, Dāmodaradeva imposed a nominal religious tithe (*dharma kar*) on his disciples. On the eve of his death he asked his disciples to pay religious tithe to Bhaṭṭadeva, his successor.[19]

So long Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva were alive, their satras functioned as central organizations. Local satras over which their principal disciples presided, were dependent upon the central satras for religious guidance and directions. Local or regional satras resembled the Sikh *Sangats* over which local *masands* presided under the supervision of the Guru. But after their death each regional satra became independent of each other owing to the absence of a pontifical authority who could command allegiance from all.

The organizational side of satras in eastern Assam owes a great deal to Vaṁśigopāladeva who brought about many changes in the management of the satra institution. In Kalābāri satra established by him in the first phase of his career in eastern Assam, the allotment of religious function was in the following way.

"Ratnākara Kandali used to recite and explain the *Bhāgavata* and Aniruddha Bhūyā recited the metrical translations of the same. Yadumaṇi initiated songs and eight others used to repeat the refrain. Murāri with his six assistants chanted *kīrtana*. There were also three leaders whose duty was to lead congregational prayer-services at three parts of each day."[20] For the regular worship of images installed by him, one head-priest (*vṛhat-aeurī*) assisted by twelve others were appointed.[21] He further appointed five *sravanīs* (listeners) whose duty was to listen to the recitation and exposition of the *Bhāgavata-purāna*.[22] One of his disciple was placed in charge of the common store-house ; a second one was placed in charge of collecting and depositing things presented by votaries, and a third one was entrusted with the duty of disbursing things when necessary.[23] Vaṁśigopāladeva's satra at Kuruwābāhi provided rooms for five hundred celibates and it was not unlikely that satras in eastern Assam, established later on, received impetus and considerably influenced by Kuruwābāhi satra of Vaṁśīgopāladeva.

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[14] Ibid p. 302.

[15] Ibid p. 344.

[16] Ibid p. 381.

[17] L. N. Bezbarua : *Śaṅkaradevā-Mādhavadevar Carita.* p. 238 ;
Bardowā Gurucarita, published in *Bāhī,* vol. XIII, No. 5.

[18] Nīlakaṇṭha : *Dāmodara-carita* p. 99f.

[19] Nīlakaṇṭha : Ibid, p. 144.

The last phase of the management of the satra institution was attained with the extension of royal patronage to principal satras of Assam towards the second half of the seventeenth century A.D. The Ahom and Koch kings placed at the disposal of different satras a number of persons to act as *pāiks* and certain amount of *devottara* land also. This act of royal patronage placed the satras on a sound economic footing. But the contact with the royal court thus established also brought about certain changes in the management of the institution. To maintain relation with the court, a functionary known as *khāṭaniyār* was appointed from the side of the satra. To look into the affairs of satras and to keep the royal court well-informed of conditions and situations at different satras, a royal officer known as *satriyā-baruā* was appointed by the court. Whenever a new *adhikāra* ascended the religious *gaddi*, he had to be finally recognised as such by the king.[24]

On the other hand, the royal patronage and recognition extended to satras helped a great deal to increase the sphere of their influence in villages, and people in large numbers lured by the glamour of those satras, enlisted themselves as disciples. Freedom from economic worries gave an opportunity to those satras patronised by Kings and nobles to devote themselves whole-heartedly to propagation of religion by appointing ecclesiastical officers at different villages like *medhis, sājtolās* and *pācanis*. Their duties were to keep contact with disciples residing at distant villages, to collect tithes from them, to escort villagers to the satra for initiation, and to arrange or collect necessary materials whenever the *adhikāra* visited their respective villages. These village functionaries were unnecessary in the early stages of the movement, as large-scale initiation of disciples hailing from distant villages did not take place.

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[20] Ramānanda Dvija : *Vaṁāigopāladevar Carita* p. 66f.
[21] Ramānanda Dvija : Ibid p. 107.
[22] Ibid, p. 167.
[23] Ibid, p. 185.
[24] Maṇirām Barbhāṇḍar Barua : *Buranjī-vivekaratna* (Ms).

The courtly influence affected the internal management of the satra institution also. This influence could be noticed particularly in case of satras of eastern and central Assam. The headship of satras, like kingship, began to devolve on hereditary lines. The power of the head increased considerably and he came to be designated as *adhikāra* i.e., possessor or owner of the satra. In some satras, notably in the prosperous satras of Majuli, the functionaries were graded into two or three categories according to their power and prestige. The functionaries of the first categories known as *sāt-mānbhagīya* or *bar-mānowāi* came to constitute the advisory council of the *adhikāra.* Satras having several hundred *pāiks* introduced the custom of conferring titles like *barā,* and *śaikiyā* in imitation of the Ahom administrative system.[25]

Certain formalities in imitation of the royal court crept into the affairs of some satras. The power to approach the *adhikāra* directly, without an intermediary, came to be the privilege of a few persons. The *adhikāra's* personal staff increased in number. Movements of the *adhikāra* from the satra campus to villages become more and more pompous and formal.

Location of satras : Selection of site for a satra also deserves notice. Usually satras were established on the banks of the Brahmaputra or its tributaries, because the rivers were the high-ways and by-ways of communication and transport. There were roadways no doubt, but the number of roads plodable in all seasons were negligible in number. Two more considerations weighed with the founders while selecting sites for satras. The fertility of land and availability of fish and vegetables were also contributory factors in site-selection. The nature and attitude of local people were also taken into consideration while selecting a place or site for a satra. If we cast a glance at the location of principal satras of Assam we shall invariably notice the existence of the first two contributory causes noted above and the biographical literature of medieval period bears ample testimony to it.

Present Management : For efficient management of the satras and for conducting religious services regularly, the *adhikāra* appoints from among his devotees several functionaries to hold different departments under his control. The number of such functionaries may vary according to the size and nature of each satra. The management of big satra-establishments of Assam are conducted by the following departments: (i) *maṇikuṭa,* (ii) *nāmaghar,* (iii) *dhana-bhārāl,* (iv) *cāul-bhārāl,* (v) *general management.* But in minor satras where monastic characteristics are absent, no such well-ordered division of functions is noticed.

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[25] S. K. Bhuyan (edited) : *Tuṅgkhungiā Būrañjī,* p. 14.

(i) *Maṇikuṭa management :* Every satra possesses one or more images of Viṣṇu. In satras where the practice of image-worship forms an indispensable part of the daily devotional routine, the following functionaries are usually found to exist. The man who is placed in charge of worshipping images is known as *bar-deuri* (*deuri* < *deva-gṛhika*). Under him there may be one or more assistants who are termed as *pāli-deuri*. Their duties are to prepare sandal paste, arrange *naivedya* (offering) and to kindle light. Then there are two or three *malīyās* to supply with *mālās* (garlands). In some satras there is a separate functionary to recite the thousand names of Viṣṇu.

Satras having no image of deity or where the image-worship is of secondary importance the number of functionaries working in the *maṇikuṭa* is smaller than those having images and Brahminical rituals. Excepting the formal worship (*pūjā*) as is done in the case of image, all other functions noted above are performed in the above satras before the sacred scripture installed on the holy throne.

Nāmaghar management : From morning till the early hour of night a series of devotional functions are held in the *nāmaghar*. A *vāgīś* or a *bhāgatī* reads and explains the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. He is assisted by one or more *duwalīyā-bhāgatīs* (*duwalīyā*=assistant). The person in charge of reciting Assamese scriptures is known as *paṭhaka* and when he has his assistants he is called *bar-pāṭhaka*. The person who leads the congregational prayer-services is called *bar-nāmlogowā* and his assistants are called *saru-nāmlogowā*. Each satra contains one or more orchestral parties known as *gāyana-bāyana*. The leader of the vocal musicians is called *gāyana*. Lastly, there are *naṭuwās* skilled in the art of dancing, *dhulīyās* (drum-players) and *kālīyās* (fiute players) whose duty is to entertain the deity as well as the devotees who assemble in the *nāmaghar* on different occasions.

(iii) *Dhana-bharāl management :* The treasury (*dhana-bhārāl*) of the satra remains in charge of *dhana-bhārālī*. He is the custodian of valuable properties. He keeps accounts of income derived from lands, tithes, presents and gifts from disciples and patrons. He is also required to keep regular accounts of expenditure incurred in connection with the management of the satra. The *dhana-bhārālī* has got a few subordinate functionaries including a *majindār* (accountant *cum* clerk) to assist him in the work.

(iv) *Cāul-bhārāl management :* The store department (*cāul-bhārāl*) remains under the supervision of the *cāul-bhārālī*. In addition to his usual duty of looking after the food-provision of the satra he is required to supervise works done by *pāiks* or sevaits. Under the *cāul-bhāralī* there are a few functionaries in charge of different branches of this department. They are *lon-bhārālī* (store-keeper of salt, oil and ghee), *guvā-bhārālī* (incharge of betel-nut, cloves, cinnamon etc.), *bheṭi-dharā* (receiver of gifts) *mithai-bandhā* (in charge of sweets), *paricāraka* (attendants) and *majindar* (recorder). Under each of them a few more persons work.

(v) *General management:* There are a few more functionaries who are not directly connected with any of the above departments but work for the general management of the institution. The *nāma-añjanīyā* trains up a neophyte, the *hāṭi-matā* looks after or controls the *hāṭi* (rows of huts) under his charge and the *āṭh-parīyā* keeps vigil at different hours of day and night and makes provision for offering light in the *nāmaghar* and the *maṇikūṭa.* Then there are one or more *bilanīyā* (one who distributes offerings made to the deity), a few *ṭhāi-mochās* (in charge of washing or plastering floors of the *nāmaghar* and *manikuṭa*) and a host of minor functionaries who supply the satra with fuels, earthwares, flowers, milk and such other things.

The contact between disciples of far-flung villages and the *adhikāra* is maintained through village ecclesiastical officers known as *rājmedhi, bar-medhi, sajtolā* and *pācanī.* The duties of a *rājmedhi* are to collect *guru-kar* (tithe), to keep a watchful eye on the religious life of people under his care and to maintain a regular and close connection between disciples and the satra through various ways of religious intercourse. Several villages constitute one *cahar* (diocese) over which a *rājmedhi* exercises his religious power. Next to *rājmedi* is *bar-medhi* who looks after the religious life of one or more villages under the supervision of the former. A *barmedhi* is usually assisted by a few *medhis, sajtolās* and *Pācanīs.* *Sājtolās* are generally engaged in collecting materials to be sent to the satra and *pacānīs* work as informants or carriers of orders. In return for their service rendered, they are exempted from any payment or enjoy revenue-free land of the satra.

Formerly, when big satras had to maintain a close contact with the royal court of the pre-British days, an officer known as *khāṭaniyār* was maintained to deal with all official business that had to be transacted in the royal court. This functionary is still maintained to represent the satra in all official matters. Another notable mofussil functionary of the satra is *mukhtiyār* who remains in carge of settling revenue-free lands with different parties.[26]

Functionaries noted above are usually graded into three categories according to their responsibility and power. Persons placed in charge of different departments and branches of the satra-establishment are considered as members of the first category and therefore, they are entitled to receive the maximum honour. They are called *bar-mānowāi* or *sāt-mānbhagīyā* (*sāt*=seven *mān*=prestige, *bhāg*=share). Their high status is indicated by the honoured seats alloted to them on ceremonial occasions and also by additional share of distributable things offered to them as token of respect. In the monastic satras situated in Majuli, the functionaries of this category constitute the advisory council of the *adhikāra*.

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[26] Accounts submitted by Āuniāṭi, Dakhiṇapāṭ, Garamūr and Kuruwabāhi satras to the Superintendent of Ethnogrophy, Assam 1905 (Transcript No. 142, vol. XXIII, D. H. A. S.), have given a detailed list of officers working in those satras. The number of functionaries in each of the above satras exceeds one hundred. In minor satras, we do not come across such well-ordered departments and the number of officers also is smaller. Designation of functionaries are not always uniform. For instance, the worshipper of images of the deity in Āuniāti satra is called *deurī,* but in Dakhiṇapāṭ satra he is called *pūjārī.*

Functionaries of the second category are known as *saru-mānowāi* (*saru* =minor, small, *mānowāi*=man of prestige). Those functionaries, who generally perform the duties of assistants and in the absence of their respective chiefs officiate in their behalf, are placed in the second category. They occupy seats next to the functionaries of the first order. The minor functionaries of the satra are placed in the third category. To the first category belong *bar-pūjārī, bar-bhāgatī, bar-nāmlagowā, bar-pāṭhaka, dhan-bhārāli, cāul-bhārāli* etc.; to the second category belong *pāli-pūjārī* (*pāli*=assistant) *duwaliyā-bhāgatī* (*duwaliya*=second in order), *saru-nāmlagowā, saru-paṭhaka, mithai-bhārālī, lon-bhārālī, purohita* etc.; and to the third category belong *āth-pariyā, maliyā, guwā-kaṭiyā* (betel-nut cutter), *naṭuwā, āldharās* (personal attendants) etc.[27]

Of the mofussil functionaries, *rajmedhi* belongs to the first category, *barmedhi* to the second and ordinary *medhis*, and *pācanīs* to the third category. All functionaries noted above hold offices under the controlling authority of the *adhikāra*. In case of absence or inability of the *adhikāra*, the *dekā-adhikāra* exercises the controlling power. The authority of appointing or discharging any functionary theoretically rests with the *adhikāra*, but he usually consults the senior functionaries in such matters.[28]

Income : The present income of satras is mainly derived from two sources. These two sources are, (i) lands originally granted by the kings of the pre-British days and subsequently confirmed and recognised by the British Government; (ii) religious tithes contributed by disciples.[29] All affluent satras possess in varying degrees land-grants ranging from a few acres to several thousand acres of land, some of which are totally free of revenue and others are half-free. According to *the District Gazetteers of Assam*, 1905, Āuniāti, Dakhinapāṭ Kamalābārī and Beṅgenā-āti satras, possess 21,000, 10,000, 5,900, and 2,500 acres of revenue-free land besides a large amount of acreage, half-free of revenue.[30] The minor satras, of course, are not in possession of such a huge amount of revenue-free land, but most of them possess some amount of revenue-free land or assessed at half the usual rate of revenue.

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[27] Transcript No. 142, vol. XXIII, D.H.A.S. Gauhati.

[28] Ibid.

[29] *District Gazetteers of Assam* (Sibsagar) p. 98f.

The second source yields income according to the number of disciples ; the greater the number of disciples, the higher is the income and *vice-versa.* Every disciple is expected to make a small contribution annually in cash or kind to his satra. Formerly this demand was small enough and did not generally exceed from four to eight annas in cash and a few seers of rice or some wearing apparel, if possible. This in itself was only a small tax upon the villagers, but the aggregate of such subscription served to make bigger satras extremely prosperous institutions. Formerly, the payment of annual tithe to the Guru was considered a moral obligation by the disciples. There is a popular saying which enjoins the payment of tax to the king (*rajār khājānā*) and tithe to the Guru (*gurur kar*).

In addition to the above regular sources of income, occasional presents or offerings from devotees and patrons and special subscription (*baraṅgani*) raised from disciples to meet expenses of important functions are the two additional but irregular sources of income. Though there is no legal obligation to pay that sum, yet force of the religious obligation was strong enough to induce people to pay that small amount.

Onwership and property: There are three types of ownership, (i) ownership vested in the idol of a satra, (ii) ownership vested in the community of devotees, (iii) family ownership. In the first case the satra theoretically belongs to the chief idol of the deity to whose name the entire property of the satra is dedicated. For instance, all movable and immovable properties of the Āuniāti satra belong to Govinda, the chief idol of Viṣṇu installed therein. The *adhikāra* acts as a trustee of the satra properties. He can dispose of any property of the satra only in the case of legal necessity. He may or may not consult his disciples, though ordinarily he takes them into confidence. The ownership is sometimes collectively vested in the community of devotees with the *satriyā* or *adhikāra* as the formal head. An assembly or council of elder devotees of the satra elected or selected from disciples with the *adhikāra* as the formal head decides all important issues concerning the satra and its properties. Under this system the *adhikāra* is nothing but a figure-head. This mode of ownership is in vogue since early times in Barpetā and a few other satras of western Assam. The third mode of ownership, i.e., ownership vested in the family, is prevalent in most of the hereditary satras. The adhikārship of this type of satras has been traditionally and invariably held by one particular family and all movable and immovable properties are held in the name of the family. The *adhikāra* manages the satra in consultation with the senior members of the family.

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[30] **Ibid (Sibsagar).**

Properties of celibate devotees: So far as the properties of the celibate devotees residing within the satra campus are concerned, it is traditionally considered a part of the satra property. Their kinsmen cannot lay any claim to the property left by them.[31] Satras with extensive landed properties generally allot one or two villages to principal celibate devotees from which they (celibates) can earn an income in the shape of presents and gifts from disciples of those villages. Whatever property is left by a celibate devotee after his death, it is spent to meet his obsequial rites and if anything is left after that it goes to the treasury of the satra. But if the *āldharā* of the deceased devotee is found to be without any property the *adhikāra* may grant him a part of the property. If anybody dies without any property the expense of the obsequial rites is borne from the treasury of the satra.[32]

In some satras, however, property left by a deceased celibate is inherited by the junior celibate serving and residing with him.

Types of satras: Four types of the satra-establishment are found in different parts of Assam. There are a few satras which are purely monastic in nature. The *adhikāra* with clerical devotees leads there the life of a celibate. No woman is allowed to stay at night within the four walls of the satra campus. Woman is not allowed even at day-time to enter the satra establishment except on religious grounds. In the second type, the *adhikāra* and his devotees as well, lead householder's life with wife and children. In the third type the *adhikāra* and the *dekā-adhikāra* remain as celibates, but thereby they do not detach themselves altogether from the family. Although celibate, they remain within the family like any other member. The fourth type is an admixture of the first and the second type. Here the *adhikāra* and the *dekā-adhikāra* are married but their devotees consist of both celibates and non-celibates. The celibates generally reside within the campus of the satra. The first type is a highly developed one having a distinct community life governed by its own rules and regulations.

In western Assam, specially in Kamrup district, an institution similar to the satra is satsangī-math (association of holy persons) which is popularly known as *sacaṅg*. It is called satsangī, because heads of at least five such institutions form a sort of association having an *ācārya* who presides over their religious meetings. It is also a Vaiṣṇavite institution having a prayer hall or a *sanctum-sanctorum* where idol of some deity is preserved and worshipped. The *satsaṅgi* or *sacaṅg* institution is more of the nature of a private property having its relation confined to a limited few. The esoteric practices were once widely prevalent in these satsaṅgī maths. These satsaṅgi maths came into existence in the early part of the eighteenth century and some of organisers of these institution managed to procure land-grants and *pāiks* (serving men) from the Ahom kings, specially from Śiva Śiṁha (1714-1744). There are about fifteen such *sacaṅg* in Kamrup district alone. In *sacaṅg* we do not have such elaborate paraphernalia, as we usually notice in a satra. The system of ordaining disciples is not uniformly prevalent in all satsangī institutions and heads are not usually designated as *adhikāra*. The primary object of these *sacaṅgs*, it appears, was not to propagate Vaiṣṇavism as such, but to built up a religious centre where people would occasionally meet for religious purposes.

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[31] Transcript No. 142, vol. XXIII, D.H.A.S.

[32] Transcript No. 142, vol. XXIII, D.H.A.S. Gauhati.

Gradation of satras: All satras, irrespective of their material prosperity, occupy equal position in respect of religious matters. Religious activities of one satra cannot be questioned or nullified by another satra, and consequently we do not find any satra occupying the position of a central institution exercising the powers of a central authority. But in practice, the parent or the main satras occupy a higher status or position of honour than their branches or offshoots. To make the point more clear, let us take the case of Dihing satra which is considered one of the principal satras of Assam. It has several branch satras established by descendants of Bar yadumaṇi who founded the Bāhbāri satra which later on shifted to the bank of the Dihing river and henceforth came to be known as Dihing satra. The heads of its branches viz. Namāti, Dhalar, Telpāni, Śilikhātal, and Leṅgdi, established by descendants of Yadumaṇi still give precedence to the head of the Dihiṅg satra in any religious or social assembly. Such branches established by descendants and relations are known as *śalā-banti* satras, because it is supposed that these branches were founded by fetching religious flickers from the main satra. In addition to these branches, there is a third category of satras occupying a bit lower position of honour than the main one. This type of satras were established by disciples in obedience to the orders of the founders of the parent satras and therefore they are known as *ājñāpar satras* (*ājñā*=orders). For instance, Govindapur, Karigāon, Madhumiśra and a few others are *ājñāpar* satras of the Āuniāti satra. It should not, however, be supposed that *śalābanti* and *ājñāpar* satras are in any way under the control of the parent satra.

Then again, in each of the three Saṁhatis (except Kāla Saṁhati) there are a few satras which are not only held in high esteem but their opinion and judgment on religious matters carry greater weight than the rest. Thus Āuniāti, Daksiṇapāt, Garamūr and Kuruwabāhi of the Brahma Saṁhati, Bardowā, Narowā, Kowamarā, Dīghalī and Cāmaguri of the

Puruṣa Saṁhati, Kamalābāri and Barpetā of the Nikā Saṁhati occupy an exalted position among other satras of their respective Saṁhati. The causes that contributed to raise the status in the estimation of the people above all other satras are mainly three,—(i) the royal patronage which gave them wealth and position, (ii) dignity and sombre appearance maintained by them all through their history and (iii) their past tradition associated with some of the outstanding religious proselytisers of the Vaiṣṇavite period. Thus the early history of Barpetā satra is intimately connected with activities of Mādhavadeva and Mathurādasa Ātā, and Kamalābārī satra with Badala Ātā. Similarly, Daksiṇapāt, Kuruwābāhi and the Āuniāti satras owe their origin to Vanamālideva and Vaṁśīgopāladeva, the two notable personalities of the Vaiṣṇavite period. Bardowā, Narowā, Kowāmarā, Dighalī and Cāmaguri satras were founded by the descendants of Śaṅkaradeva the initiator of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement in Assam, and these satras have preserved the relics of Śaṅkaradeva till today. The fact that these satras originated from the family of Śaṅkaradeva is considered as an additional factor in assigning an honoured position to them. Thus, we find that though theoretically there is no difference in status between one satra and another in respect of religious matters, yet in practice, difference is maintained on considerations mentioned above.

Ecclesiastical tour: In winter seasons when the weather is clear and village roads and paths are dry and plodable, the heads of satras go out to the villages to see for themselves the conditions of disciples. The local officers of satras viz. *barmedhis, rājmedhis* and *pācanis,* are usually informed in advance of the actual tour and they on receipt of the information make necessary arrangements for the stay of the Gosains and their accompanying devotees by constructing temporary residences and collecting necessary articles from the village disciples. The heads of minor satras are usually put up in village *nāmaghars,* but *adhikāras* of big and influential satras with whom more than hundred devotees accompany, stay in temporary huts popularly called *bāhar* (*vāsa+ghara*) erected specially on the occasion of their visit. Such *bāhars* for the heads of monastic satras are usually constructed in open fields, and never in the midst of villages. On such visits the heads not only initiate village boys and young men but collect tithes and decide religious and social disputes.

Tours are generally attended with considerable pomp and dignity. If the journey is done during the rainy season the Gosains of big satras and their followers travel in state barges whose curved prows and slender lines distinguish them from ordinary rough-built country boats. On the surface, Gosains are carried on litters; drums are beaten and cymbals clashed before them and when they alight they are not permitted to touch the ground with bare feet. After contacting the village disciples and administering as far as possible to their religious needs, they return to their head-quarters before the rainy season sets in.[33] It has been a traditional custom with the few monastic satras that whenever the *adhikāra* goes out for village tours, he must not return within six months. He can return on expiry of six months from the date of his starting. Incidentally, the tradition of not moving out from the satra campus during the rainy season reminds us of *Vassāvāsa* of the Buddhist monastic order. Bhikkhus of all denominations used to observe 'rain-retreat' ; it means cessation from wandering during monsoon.[34]

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[33] *District Gazetteers of Assam* (*Nowgong*) p. 90.

[34] S. Dutt : Buddhist Monachism, p. 101.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGIOUS RITES AND PRACTICES

It is needless to go into details of *smārta* rites observed in accordance with the prescription of dharmaśāstras. The attitude held by the early Vaiṣṇava reformers in particular and Vaiṣṇavas in general towards these rites have been discussed in the third chapter. It will be sufficient here to state that Vaiṣṇavas of the twice-born class regularly observe *nitya* and *naimitikka* rites prescribed in the *śāstras* and those of other higher castes and sub-castes also perform the principal *saṁskāras* according to traditional śāstric process. Vaiṣṇavas belonging to backward classes and tribes, however, do not uniformly perform these śāstric rites or *saṁaskāras*. Some of them, notably the Koches and the Chutiyas, have adopted it, but many others have not taken to these rites.

As the *smārta* rites are more or less identical throughout India, we will, therefore, confine ourselves to those rites which are exclusively observed by Vaiṣṇavas.

Rites of initiation and confirmation: A person in order to qualify himself to be considered as a genuine member of the Vaiṣṇava community and to take active part in all religious functions, must of necessity, be initiated by the head of the satra with which his family is traditionally connected. The rite of initiation is called *śaraṇa* and it is usually performed by the *adhikāra* within the satra campus. But, whenever the *adhikāra* goes on ecclesiastical tours to see for himself conditions of disciples at villages, the rite of initiation is also performed during such tours. The rite should be performed as a rule before a person attains his majority. The character and conduct of the person seeking initiation should be tested before he is formally initiated. But as the process of observing and testing requires some days and as it might not be possible in all circumstances, the rite of initiation is performed relying on verbal testimony of good conduct given by some senior devotees. But in the case of him who intends to lead a celibate life as a member of any of the monastic communities, a certain period of apprenticeship is compulsory. As in the case of Buddhist monasticism where four months of probationary period (*parivāsa*) was necessary or Christian monasticism of the Benedictine order where a novice had to remain a year's novitiate, Assamese monasticism also enjoins a probationary period of a few months before a novice is formally initiated and taken as a regular member of the community.

Like *prabbajjā* and *upasampadā* of Buddhist monasticism, there are also two stages of devotional hierarchy in Assamese Vaiṣṇavism. The first viz., *śaraṇa* marks the formal entry of a person into the Vaiṣṇavite order. It is of the nature of an oath by which the communicant promises to lead the life of a true Vaiṣṇava under the sheltering guidance of the Guru. The second stage is marked by a ceremony known as *bhajana* where a person is recognised as a confirmed devotee by laying bare before him the deeper and esoterical mysteries of the cult. It is mainly intended for those who are spiritually advanced and who intend to lead an intensely devotional life. The *bhajana* ceremony is usually accompanied by conferment of rosary (*mālā*) with an appropriate *mantra*.

In the initial stage of the Vaiṣṇava movement, probably there was no other ceremony save and except the *saraṇa*. It is told in the biographies of Śaṅkaradeva that he introduced the system of 'four saraṇas' (*cāri-śaraṇa*) by deriving the idea of absolute surrender to Lord Kṛṣna from the *Padma-Gītā*, the supremacy and efficacy of the names of Viṣṇu from the *Padma-purāṇa* and the indispensability of holy association from the *Bhāgavata-puraṇa*. The idea of the fourth principle, viz., the supreme necessity of a Guru, is said to have been introduced by himself when he received Mādhavadeva as an ideal disciple.[1] A solemn oath to place oneself absolutely under the shelter of the above four principles perhaps constituted the essence of the *śaraṇa* ceremony during the initial stage of the movement. There was no bar in the shape of a separate ceremony to recognise a person as a confirmed devotee. We do not come across any other ceremony known as *bhajana* in the early biographies of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva.

With the expansion and development of satra institution the *śaraṇa* ceremony also underwent a process of modification and became more and more formal and esoteric in nature. Instructions on esoteric Yoga including details of the nerve system (*nāḍis*) and plexus (*cakras*) began to form parts of the initiation ceremony. Thus, it became too complicated a process for novices. Therefore, a new ceremony known as *bhajana* was introduced to accommodate the spiritually advanced devotees where higher and subtler instructions were imparted. With the introduction of this ceremony the initiation ceremony became once more a simple process.

Though the detailed procedure of the initiation ceremony is not uniform in all satras, yet there is general agreement in fundamental points. The principal steps of the initiation ceremony in respect of which the all Saṁhatis agree, have been noted below.[2]

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[1] U. C. Lekhāru (edited) : *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 34.

[2] Details of the procedure of initiation prevalent in satras of the four Saṁhatis have been minutely described in *Burañjī-vivekaratna* by Manirām Barbhāṇḍar Barua.

(i) The condidate seeking initiation is required to keep himself clean in body and mind from the previous day of initiation and he should observe religious fasting in which a single vegetarian diet is allowed to be taken.

(ii) In the next day, i.e., the day of initiation, the rite of purification and expiration takes place after the morning bath is over.

(iii) He is then taken to the presence of the principal image of Viṣṇu installed in the satra where he is asked to bow down five times to the image and to the *adhikāra* as well. In the case of Nikā, Kāla and Puruṣa Saṁhatis, instead of an image any of the scriptures composed by Śaṅkaradeva or Mādhavadeva is placed on a *śarāi* (a tray having a pedestal) to which the person seeking initiation is aked to bow down. He is then acquainted with the history of the sect to which the satra is affiliated, tracing the origin to one of the mythological devotees. Thus Brahma, Nikā, Puruṣa and Kāla Saṁhatis trace their origin to Brahmā, Nārada, Mahādeva and Ananta respectively.

(iv) The real part of initiation takes place at the next stage. Here the novice is asked to take an oath, by which he is required to surrender himself to the four fundamental principles (*cari-vastu*), viz., *Nāma, Deva, Guru* and *Bhakat.*[2] . This process consists of a few steps and at the end of each step the seeker is required to prostrate before the image or the scripture touching the ground with eight parts of his body (*aṣṭānga-pranāma*). In this process the four adorable names of the deity viz., Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa and Hari (*cāri-nāma*) are revealed to the communicant for daily meditation or prayer.

(v) At this stage the significance of and difference between *manas* and *ātmān* and the process of achieving their unity (*aikya-sādhana*) for spiritual attainment are explained to the novice.

(vi) Description and explanation of six plexuses (*saṭ-cakra*), nerves (*nāḍis*), five subtle elements (*pañca-tanmātra*), five gross elements (*pañca-mahābhūta*), ten organs (*daśa-indriya*), ten winds (*daśa-vāyu*) and lastly cosmological and cosmogonical accounts of the creation are given out in details.

(vii) The Guru then explains to the neophyte how the universe (*brahmāṇḍa*) remains in a miniature form within the microcosm (*piṇḍa*).

(viii) The process of mental worship (*mānasa-pūja*) of the Guru and of the deity is then taught to the person.

(ix) Beatific forms (*mūrti*) of Rāma, Kṛṣna, Nārāyaṇa and Hari (Viṣṇu) are analysed and explained.

(ix) Elements and characteristics of Bhakti, meritorious and sinful

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[2a] Śarana-saṁhita, III/27-28.

deeds, ways and conducts of life and such other topics relating to Bhakti are explained to the newly initiated person. The person thus initiated should take a few days' training under a trained devotee known as *nāma-āñjanīyā.*

Though all the above instructions come within the scope of *śarana* ceremony, the esoterical and philosophical instructions noted in (v), (vi), (vii) and (viii) are generally reserved for the *bhajana* stage. A novice cannot be expected to grasp those matters without a preliminary knowledge of those things. Esoteric interpretations of various tenets, rites and practices of the cult, the theological doctrines and detailed rules and conducts are laid bare before the devotee at this stage. The devotee at this stage gets an opportunity to probe deeper into the mystery of the cult.

conferment of mālā: A confirmed devotee is usually conferred with a duly consecrated rosary carved out of basil plant or sandal wood, consisting of 108 or 1000 beads. Rosaries used by Vaiṣṇavas of Assam do not contain *meru* (largest bead in the central joint of rosary) but they contain four to sixteen *nāvis* (small knots). *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita* by Daityāri Ṭhākur narrates a controversy between Mādhavadeva and some of his adversaries as to the propriety of inserting a *meru* in a rosary. Mādhavadeva is stated to have stressed the inadvisability of inserting *meru* in a rosary with which only names of a particular deity are muttered or remembered.[3] He admitted its necessity in a rosary with which a *tantric-mantra* is practised.

The use of rosary is prevalent in the Puruṣa and the Brahma Saṁhatis. The satras affiliated to the Nikā and the Kāla Saṁhatis do not have the system of conferring rosary on their disciples. The ceremony of conferring rosary on a devotee is as elaborate a process as that of initiation. The main features are noted below.

Having consecrated the rosary by dipping it in holy water for five times and purifying (*saṁskāra*) it according to set formulas, the deity in his four adorable forms is worshipped in the rosary. The Guru then utters inaudibly the four adorable names (Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa, Hari etc.) of the deity from ten to one thousand times touching each bead of the rosary.

After the preliminaries are over, the Guru narrates the origin of the rosary and traces the process through which that particular type of rosary came to be associated with the Saṁhati to which the satra is affiliated. Next, he whispers the four names of the adorable deity for five, seven or nine times in the right ear of the conferee and then puts the rosary on the head of the devotee. The spiritual guide then explains the significance of each letter forming the four names of the deity as well as of the term *mālā.*

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[3] Daityari Ṭhākur : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita,* p. 393f.

The esoteric significance of beads and the thread of the rosary is communicated to the conferee by the Guru and then the procedure of *jāgarana* (awakening of spiritual potency) and the mode of handling the rosary are also taught. Finally the procedure of conducting *japa* (meditation) with the help of the rosary is shown to the conferee.[4]

In satras affiliated to the Brahma Saṁhati, a Vaiṣṇava *mantra* consisting of eight, or twelve or eighteen syllables, is offered to a disciple in course of conferring a rosary. The system of conferring *dīksā* of both tantric and pauranic types is prevalent in a few satras of the Brahma Saṁhati.[5]

Worship: Worship (*pūjā*) of image in the traditional sāstric manner has lost its importance in satras excepting those of the Brahma Saṁhati. As the position of image is of secondary importance in the three other Saṁhatis, its worship also is not considered as a necessary part of the regular devotional routine followed in satras.

It is stated in all biographies of Śaṅkaradeva that he installed an wooden image of Viṣṇu at Dhuāhāṭā in eastern Assam. This he did, according to the biographies, with a view to winning over the Brahmins to his side.[6] Excepting this solitary instance of image-worship no other instance of image-worship could be noticed during his life. His disciple Mādhavadeva was also not an exponent of image-worship but they did not prohibit their disciples to do it.

Though the practice of image-worship is considered as of no importance in satras affiliated to the three sub-sects of the Mahāpuruṣīyā cult, yet many a satra contains one or more images of Viṣṇu. The motive behind the installation of image in those satras was to enhance the outward show and respectability, which helped to attract people towards those institutions. Another reason for installing images in satras of the Kāla, Nikā and Puruṣa Saṁhatis, might be to gain patronage from kings and nobles who generally granted land and property in the name of an image. That the images of these satras serve only a decorative purpose, could be inferred from the fact that daily religious services and all principal devotional functions are held before the sacred scripture and not before the images. Only on special occasions like Dola-Yātrā, in which an image of Viṣṇu is indispensable for the ceremony, religious functions are held before an image.

But, in satras affiliated to the Brahma Saṁhati the worship of

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[4] Manirām Barbhāṇḍar Barua : *Burañjī-vivekaratna* (Ms.); T. N. Goswāmī : *Vaiṣṇava-mālā*, p. 46.

[5] Harideva Goswāmī : *Dakṣiṇapāṭ Satrar Itivṛtta* (Ms.) The manuscript was lent for my use by his holiness the Adhikāra of the Dakṣinapāṭ satra.

[6] Daityāri Ṭhākur : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita*, p. 86.

śalagrāma and various images of Viṣṇu forms the most important item of daily services. Dāmodaradeva, Bhaṭṭadeva, Vaṁśīgopāladeva and all other apostles of this sub-sect were regular image-worshippers.[7] The mode of worship is noted below:

Having given the daily bath to the image with appropriate *mantra* (*mantra* recited is usually the Vedic Puruṣa-sūkta), the image is worshipped with ten or sixteen varieties of offerings. On ordinary days worship is performed with *daśopacāras* consisting of *pādya* (water for washing feet), *arghya* (offering of water containing rice, *durvā* grass and flower), *ācamanīya* (water for sipping), *snānīya* (water for bath), *gandha* (perfume), *puṣpa* (flower), *dhūpa* (incense), *dīpa* (light), *naivedya* (food offering and *vandana* (obeisance). But on special occasions the image is worshipped with six more additional *upacāras* viz., *āsana* (seat), *svāgata* (welcome), *madhuparka* (milk and honey), *punarācamanīya* (water for sipping second time), *ābharaṇa* (ornaments) and *vasana* (dress). The thousand names of Viṣṇu (enumerated in the *Padma-purāṇa*, or in the *Mahābhārata*) are daily recited before the image. A neverfailing light (*akhaṇḍapradīpa*) is kept burning throughout day and night. *Bhoga* is offered to the deity every day except on days of *ambuvāci, ekādaśī* and annual death ceremonies of predeceased *adhikāras*. The worship of the deity is never suspended except on the occasion of *ambuvācī* (days on which the earth is supposed to be in a state of impurity). On this occasion the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* replaces the image as the object of worship. The image is laid to rest after the evening services are over.

In satras affiliated to the three other Saṁhatis where the practice of image-worship is of secondary importance, religious services and functions are conducted before the sacred scripture installed on an altar or a throne. This mode of worship has been in vogue amongst many other sects of India. The Sikhs, the Dadu-panthis, the Jainas and Pranāmis of Gujarata, for instance, are in the habit of worshipping scriptures. In the *Kalikā-purāṇa* and the *Yoginī-tantra* the worship of scripture and footware (*pādukā*) has been recommended.[8]

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[7] Nīlakantha : *Dāmodara-carita* p. 79 ; Rāmarāya : *Gurulīlā*, p. 204 ; Rāmānanda : *Vaṁśīgopāladevar Carita*, p. 107

[8] *liṅgasthāṁ pūjayeddevīṁ pustakasthāṁ tathaivaca*
sthandilasthāṁ mahāmāyāṁ pāduka pratimasuca
Kālikā-purāṇa 58/31.
pustake pratimāvāñca sthandileca maheśvarī
pādukāyaṁ citrapate tathā khadge'nale jale
lauhityeca gaṅgāyāṁca sāgare tīrthasaṁgame
pratipīṭhe vilvamūle liṅgasthāṁ devīmarecayet
Yogini-tantra, 6/142-43.

It is narrated in the biographies that Śaṅkaradeva initiated his disciples by placing a devotional scripture on an altar (*thāpanā*) to which persons initiated were asked to bow down. It is told in *Bardowā-guru-carita* and in *Śaṅkara-carita* by Rāmacarana Ṭhākur that Śaṅkaradeva on the eve of his final departure to Cooch-Behar advised Mādhavadeva to look for him, if and when necessary, in the pages of *Kīrtana* and *Daśama*.[9] Perhaps on the strength of this utterance, Mādhavadeva established the sacred scriptures composed by Śaṅkaradeva on a pre-eminent position by formally installing *Daśama-skandha* (*Bhāgavata*) on the sacred altar of the Barpeta satra.[10] According to *Kathā-gurucarita*, Mādhavadeva too, advised his disciples to regard *Kīrtana* and *Daśama* as representative of Śaṅkaradeva and *Nāmaghoṣā* as his own representative.[11] On the eve of his death, when asked by his followers, to nominate some one as his successor, he asked them to read and re-read *Nāmaghoṣā* and regard it as their guide. He, therefore, did not nominate anybody as his successor.[12] Thus, Mādhavadeva raised the status of the sacred scriptures composed by Śaṅkaradeva and himself by making them symbol of Godhead as well as of their own selves. After Mādhavadeva, it became a uniform practice amongst the Vaiṣṇavas of the Mahāpuruṣīyā cult to instal one of the four principal scriptures, viz., *Daśama, Kīrtana, Nāmaghoṣā* and *Ratnāvalī* composed by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva respectively, on the sacred altar (*thāpana*) as the symbol of the deity and the first two Gurus. But the nature of worship of an image differs from that of a scripture is that while the former is conducted according to the pan-Indian *pūja-paddhati*, i.e., with Sanskrit mantras and rituals, the latter consists entirely of devotional prayers and recitations, and offering is made with *pañcopacāras* (*gandha, puṣpa, dhūpa, dīpa* and *naivedya*).

A form of relic worship (though it cannot be called relic worship in the strict sense of the term) is prevalent in almost all the principal satras. Foot-impressions cut on stones (*pada-śilā*) and footwares (*pādukā*), supposed to be of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva or of any other apostle are carefully preserved and homage is paid to them regularly with incense and offerings. Places where such objects of relic are kept are called *thānas* (Sk. *sthāna*). In satras of Puruṣa Saṁhati relics of Śankaradeva,

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[9] Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carita* p. 295 ; *Bardowā-gurucarita*, published in the monthly journal *Bāhī*, vol. II-V (1832-36 Śaka).

[10] L. N. Bezbaruā : *Śrīśaṅkaradeva āru Sri-mādhavadeva*, p. 232f.

[11] "*edin Gurujane bole Daśam, Kīrtan Gurujanar mūrtir samān,*
Ghoṣā, Ratṅāvali āmār thākibar sthan."
Kathā-gurucarita, p. 502

[12] Daityāri Ṭhāknr : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita*, p. 382f ;
Kathā-gurucarita, p. 514.

Puruṣottama Ṭhākur, Caturbhuja Ṭhakur, and Kanakalatā are being preserved and worshipped. In the same way, foot-impressions, footwares and other things supposed to be once used by apostles of the other three Saṁhatis have been preserved and worshipped. In satras of the Kāla Saṁhati, places of cremation of deceased *adhikāras,* called *agni-thāna,* are also carefully preserved and disciples pay their homage annually on the occasions of the death anniversaries.

The practice of relic-worship in different forms has been in vogue amongst different sects of India from ancient times. It has been in use in Jainism, Buddhism and many other medieval sects, so it is not a peculiar trait of Vaiṣṇavas of Assam alone.

This practice of relic-worship came to be in vogue after the death of Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva. In biographies of Mādhavadeva or Dāmodaradeva we do not come across any instance of relic-worship. But biographies of later saints contain several references to this practice. Miśradeva, the successor of Vaṁśīgopaladeva, Vanamālīdeva, the founder of Daksiṇapāṭ satra and Anantarāya the founder of Kowāmarā satra, worshipped, as stated in their biographies, the wooden foot-wares of their predecessors, viz., Vaṁśigopāladeva, Dāmodaradeva and Puruṣottama Ṭhākur respectively.[13] Anantarāya, on procuring a pair of wooden sandals (*khaḍam*) of his grandfather Puruṣottama, placed it on his head with great reverence for a few minutes and finally laid it on a tray (*thagī*) so that all his disciples could bow down to it.[14]

Daily prayer-services: The worship of image is usually conducted by a single individual; the entire group of devotees cannot take part in it. Therefore, different types of congregational services were introduced in the daily religious routine of satras. These services continue from morning till the early hours of night. The singing of hymns and songs, the chanting of prayers to the accompaniment of musical instruments and the reading and explaining of the *Bhāgavata* and the *Gītā,* constitute the chief features of the services. The whole programme is called *nāmaprasaṅga* i.e. prayers and the functions connected with prayers.

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[13] Ramānanda : *Vaṁśigopāladevar Carita* p. 225 ; Ramākānta : *Vanamālidevar Carita,* p. 65 ; Bhadracāru Dāsa : *Anantarāya-carita* (Ms).

[14] *mora abhiprāya ābe ihā śuniyoka*
Puruṣottamadevara khaḍam āniyoka
śuniyā Sāraṅgapāṇi Ātā tetikṣana
khaḍam dukhāni āni dilā tatakṣana
dekhiyā Ananta Ātā hāta pāti lailā
mahāprema bhāve niyā śirata carāilā
thagira opare pāce thailā sevā kari
savabhakte seva karilanta pari pari
Anantarāsya-carita (Ms).

According to *Kathā-gurucarita*, each *prasaṅga*, consisting of several units, should depict four sentiments, viz. (1) *sthāpana*, (2) *vandana*, (3) *ānanda*, (4) *khela*.[15] The first depicts the sentiment of joy which spontaneously arises in course of prayerful invocation to the deity. The second depicts the worshipful attitude of devotees through their prayers of self-surrender. The third depicts joy and happiness of the people of Braja and of devotees owing to the presence of Kṛṣṇa in their midst. The last depicts the plays and childish pranks of Kṛṣṇa in the company of cowherd boys as well as sports (*līlā*) of God in different *avatāras*.

The total number of items of services is fourteen in the three Mahāpuruṣīya sub-sects and twelve in the sub-sects of Dāmodaradeva and Harideva. These are grouped into three divisions to be observed in morning, afternoon and evening. In minor satras where the number of devotees entirely devoted to the devotional pursuit is limited, all the items are not observed. The order of items in each service is not uniform in all satras. But the principal items of each service are approximately the same.

At the initial stage of the movement the number of units was not fixed and the order of performance of different items was not determined. It is told in the *Kathā-gurucarita* that after the death of Śaṅkaradeva, his successor Mādhavadeva fixed the number of units at fourteen and determined the order of conducting those items in morning, afternoon and evening services.[16] The number of items in each service and their order of performance in the sub-sect of Dāmodaradeva were fixed and systematised by Dāmodaradeva himself.[17] Bhaṭṭadeva made further modification in the procedure of conducting daily services.

Later on, every satra made certain alterations in the procedure of conducting daily services originally prepared by Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva. Songs and hymns composed by the founder of each satra were introduced in place of those composed by Śaṅkaradeva or Mādhavadeva. Of course, the major portions of prayers, songs, hymns and recitations are adopted from the writings of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva.

It is not possible to record the detailed order of items of different services observed in so many satras with so many local variations. The detailed programme of services observed in the Barpetā satra, the earliest and the most influential satra of the Mahāpuruṣīyā sects, has been recorded below as a specimen.

Morning Service :

(i) The first item of the morning service consists in singing two

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[15] *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 521.

[16] Ibid, p. 1.

[17] Rāmrāya : *Gurulīlā*, p. 72 ; Ramākānta : *Vanamalidevar Carita*, p. 9.

Bargīta in Ahira or Kau or Lalita *rāga*. The first one is called *jāgaran-gīta* because it depicts the scene of rousing Kṛṣṇa from his sleep and the second one is called *cālanar-gīta* as it describes Kṛṣṇa's preparation and start for Vṛndāvana with cows.

(ii) The second item consists in chanting a *bhaṭimā* (a devotional song) which describes how Yasodā used to send Kṛṣṇa everyday to tend cows at Vṛndāvana with necessary supply of food, milk and clothes.

(iii) The third item consists in chanting *nāmachanda* (prayer consisting solely of names of Viṣṇu) and *saraṇa-chanda* (prayers expressing self-surrender and supplication). The unit is brought to a termination by reciting one or two chapters of *Kīrtana.*

(iv) The fourth item of the morning service consists in reading or reciting a few chapters from the *Bhāgavata* or the *Gītā.*

(v) In the fifth item, recitation from Assamese versions of the *Bhāgavata* or the *Gītā* takes place.

Afternoon Service :

(vi) The sixth item or the first item of the afternoon service consists in reciting a few chapters from any of the following scriptures,—*Nāmaghoṣā, Bhakti-ratnāvalī, Bhakti-ratnākara,* and *Bhakti-pradīpa.*

(vii), (viii) The seventh and the eighth items of afternoon services are identical with the third and the fourth of the morning service.

Evening Service :

(ix) In the ninth item or the first item of the evening service, one or more chapters from *Guṇamālā* are recited. *Guṇamāla* is an abridged Assamese version of Book, X of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa.*

(x) In the tenth item, some portions from *Līlāmālā* which depicts the early life of Kṛṣṇa at Gokula and Vṛndāvana are read out. *Lilāmālā* is a section of *Śaṅkaradeva's Kīrtana.*

(xi) The eleventh item consists in recitation or chanting of *Guru-bhaṭima* (homage to Śaṇkaradeva and Mādhavadeva).

(xii) This item is called *sevā-kīrtana.* It consists of two *Bargītas* sung to the instrumental playing on *khol* and *tāl* (cymbal). The two *Bargītas* sung on this occasion should describe the glory and greatness of the deity.

(xiii) The thirteenth item mainly consists in chanting *nāma-chanda* and *śaraṇa-chanda* described in the third item of the morning service.

(xiv) The last item begins with the recitation of passages from *Daśama-skandha* composed by Śaṅkaradeva. An Oja narrates the different episodes with appropriate dance and song. The service for the day terminates with readings from scriptures noted in the sixth item.

Devotional services (*prasaṅgas*) are finally brought to a close by invoking glory to Nāma, Deva, Guru, and Bhakta and blessings to the public. The founder and principal saints of the sect are also remembered at the close of daily services.[18]

Daily devotional items of services observed in satras affiliated to sub-sects of Dāmodaradeva and Harideva are twelve in number. But the nature of services in both Mahāpuruṣīyā and Dāmodarīyā sects does not differ very much. The difference lies in the fact that songs and compositions used by one sect are not usually used by the other. Satras of Brahma Saṁhati generally use compositions written by persons of their own Saṁhati.

On ceremonial occasions the following special items are generally added to the usual routine.

(i) *Ojā-pāli :* *Ojā-pāli* is a party of four or five chorus singers. The leader *ojā* leads the chorus and his assistants *pālis* repeat the refrain. The right-hand assistant (*daiṇā-pāli*) intermittently carries on dialogues with the leader of the chorus party to enliven the performance. Generally, stories from epics and Purāṇas are illustrated.

(ii) *Naṭuwā-nāc :* It is a dance performance by one player or more illustrating some incidents of Kṛṣṇa's life.

(iii) *Uthā-nāma :* It is a type of chanting prayer in standing posture with frequent rhythmic movements to the clapping of hands and cymbals.

Services observed in satras have influenced villages also, where an abridged programme of service is followed. As in a satra, so in a village there are functionaries who are in charge of religious affairs. They conduct the daily services in the village *nāmaghar*. Usually two units of service viz., congregational chanting of prayer and reading from scriptures, are held in the evening. Only on ceremonial occasions a somewhat extensive programme is followed. Prayer-services are performed before a sacred scripture installed on a throne. No distinction between the Mahāpuruṣīyā and the Dāmodarīyā sects is maintained in conducting religious services in a village *nāmaghar*. Compositions by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are recited and sung in all religious functions held in village *nāmaghars*.

Daily observances of a devotee : There is no real difference between daily observances of a celibate bhakta residing within the satra campus and those of a householder. But, as the celibate life within the religious environment of a satra affords greater opportunity for observing detailed routine of a devotional life than a householder who has so many diversions, the difference appears to be wide enough. As soon as a person is initiated he is expected to observe certain rules and practices, no matter whether he is a celibate or a householder, whether he resides within a satra precinct or in a village.

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[18] Kāntirām Burhābhakat : *Prasaṅga-praṇālī* p. 1ff ; *Hariprasaṅga* p. 1ff.

A vaiṣṇava devotee should, rise from his bed before sun-rise with the name of Mādhava in his lips. He should then utter the eight auspicious names of Nārāyaṇa (Acyuta, Keśava, Hari, Viṣṇu, Janārddana, Satya, Haṁsa and Nārāyaṇa). As soon as he sets foot on the ground he should bow apologetically to Ananta and Pṛthvī. After answering to the call of nature in the morning and cleansing himself in prescribed mode with soil and water, the devotee should cleanse his teeth and besmear the body with oil, according to prescribed method by uttering the names of Viṣṇu. The choice of twigs for tooth-brush and avoidance of oil on particular days are to be kept in view. The shaving of beards and moustaches should preferrably be done on Monday and Wednesday, uttering the name Cakrapāṇi. But if any of the above two days happens to be the birth-day of the devotee, it should be avoided.

He should then proceed to a tank or a river for bath. After untying his long tuft of hair of the head (*śikhā*), he should invoke the sacred rivers and take three dips uttering the name Nārāyaṇa before every dip. After changing clothes he should tie his hair remembering or muttering the names Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheśwara or by the *gayatrī-mantra* if he was a Brahmin. Marks of sandal paste (*tilaka*) should then be applied to twelve parts of the body. In marking his forehead, neck, naval, chest, ears, arms, sides of the body (*parśva*), centre of eye-brows and the back, a devotee should utter Keśava, purusottama, Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava, Madhusūdana, Viṣṇu, Vāsudeva, Dāmodara, Govinda, Trivikrama, Hṛsīkeṣā and Padmanābha respectively. After this he should perform *sandhyā* if he is a Brahmin and then perform *nitya-pūjā*, according to rites and incantations prescribed in *puja-paddhati*. After the conclusion of the *nitya-pūjā*, the *Gītā* or *Viṣṇu-sahasra-nāma* (the thousands names of Viṣṇu) should be recited. Those conferred with rosary should perform *japa* by telling beads.

In case of non-Brahmins, the devotee after putting on *tilaka* marks should remember his Guru and mentally worship him according to prescribed modes as instructed at the time of his initiation. After the conclusion of the mental worship (*mānasa-pūjā*) of the Guru which is popularly called *gurusevā*, the devotee should then proceed to meditate upon the *īṣṭa-devatā* (Adorable God) by remembering every limb of the deity and muttering his sacred names all the while. Persons conferred with rosary should then practise meditation (*japa*) by telling beads. This is called *hari-sevā*.

After *gurusevā* and *harisevā* are over, the devotee should chant one or two devotional songs or prayers by clapping hands or playing on cymbals. He winds up the process by reading one or two chapters from the *Gītā* or the *Bhāgavata* in original or in translation. The inmates of a satra, instead of chanting individually, participate in the congregational prayer-services.

In the evening, the householders generally perform *japa* by telling beads and chant prayers and if possible, read a few chapters from *Kīrtana* or *Nāma-ghoṣā*. Those residing within a satra join congregational prayers after finishing their evening *japa*.

In all activities whether religious or secular, sacred names of the deity should be uttered or remembered. Thus a devotee should utter the name Vāsudeva when he takes his seat for meals, Janārddana when he touches meal and Keśava when he lifts the first morsel. He should go to sleep by uttering the name Padmanābha. In the process of doing every act, one of several names of Viṣṇu should be uttered or remembered.[19]

OCCASIONAL OBSERVANCES...

The following types of observances have been described in the succeeding pages : (i) festivals, (ii) ceremonies connected with death anniversaries of saints and founders of satras and Saṁhatis, and investiture of *adhikāras*, (iii) special devotional functions, and (iv) fast. Excepting the last one the other three categories of observances are conspicuously held in satras.

Festivals: Festivals of the Vaiṣṇava sects of Assam are mainly related to some incidents or episodes of Kṛṣṇa's life and are mostly identical with those of other parts of India. In addition to those, the Vaiṣṇavas of Assam observe the three *Bihus*, the national festival of the Brahmaputra valley with appropriate manner. The following are the main Vaiṣṇava festivals of Assam observed in satras.

Janmāṣṭami: The birth anniversary of Kṛṣṇa is celebrated on the eighth lunar day of the dark fortnight in the month of Bhādra (July-August). The Vaiṣṇavas of Assam never observe it in Śrāvana (July-August) even though the almanac sometimes places it on calculation in that month.[20]

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[19] The section on daily devotional duties of a Vaiṣṇava devotee is based on T. N. Goswami's *Vaiṣṇava-nitykṛtya*.

[20] In celebrating any anniversary the Assamese people, particularly the Vaiṣṇavas, always stick to the month of birth or death. According to lunar calculation of the year, a particular *tithi* (lunar day) may change its month. For instance, according to Bengali almanac, *Janmāṣṭami* is sometimes placed in month of Bhādra and sometimes in Śrāvana. But in Assam where the year is calculated on the basis of solar month, the date of any anniversary does not move from the month in which a person was born or died.

The festival starts in the evening with illumination in honour of the Lord's birth day. A special programme of devotional services befitting the occasion is added to the usual services. After prayers and recitations, a drama dealing with the birth episode of Kṛṣṇa is performed. In satras where image-worship is prevalent, an image of Kṛṣṇa is worshipped with Śāstric rites and rituals.

On the next day which is know as *Nandotsava,* illumination takes place as on the previous day and devotional services consisting of prayers, recitation, and orchestral music continue throughout the day. A dramatic performance known as *Bokā-bhāonā* is performed. The performance depicts joy and amusement of the people of Braja at Kṛṣṇa's nativity and ends with the astrological calculation made by sage Garga. It is called *Boka-bhāona,* i.e., mud performance, because colour and mud are sprinkled by the actors at each other representing the sentiment of joy owing to Kṛṣṇa's birth.[21]

The third festival connected with Kṛṣṇa's nativity is known as *Pācati.* It is celebrated on the fifth day from the day of birth and that is why it is called *Pācati* (Sk. *pañca*). It is a festival exclusively conducted by women-folk. The festival tries to represent joy and amusement that permeated the womenfolk of Gokula at the birth of Kṛṣṇa and ceremonies performed by them to wash off impurities of the baby and the mother. In monastic satras where women have no access, it is not performed. The detailed reference to the performance of this festival is found in the *Anantarāya-carita* by Bhadracāru Dāsa.[22]

The next important festival is *Phalgutsava* celebrated on the full-moon day in the month of Phālguna (Feb-March). The festival usually lasts for three days. In the evening of the first day, preliminary purificatory rites (*adhivāsa*) connected with the worship of the deity and installation of the image on the swing take place. One of the features of the preliminary rites is the token-burning of a goat confined within a temporary shade or hut. As soon as the hut is set on fire the goat is released allowing only a few shags to be burnt. The fire is not allowed to extinguish till the festival is over. The image of Kṛṣṇa popularly called *Daul-Govinda* is circumambulated seven times around the fire. The the image is brought back to be installed on the swing with appropriate rites prescribed in Pūjā-paddhati.[23]

Prayers chanted and passages recited on this occasion are generally taken from *Oreṣā-varṇana* episode described in Śaṅkaradeva's *Kīrtana.*[24] Devotional services and worship continue till the evening of the third day. In the afternoon of the third day, the image is taken out in a procession and is carried round the adjoining area. When the image is brought back, a mock fight between those that went out with the procession and those that remained within, takes place and coloured water is sprinkled by both sides. The party supposed to be on the side of Kṛṣṇa ultimately buys peace by paying a ransom to the party supposed to be on the side of Lakṣmī. The mock fight is nothing but an imitation of the quarrel between the party which accompanied Kṛṣṇa to the house of Ghuṇucā (she is called Guṇḍicā in the Utkala-Khaṇḍa of the *Skanda-purāṇa*) and the party headed by jealous Rukmiṇī as narrated in *Ghuṇucā-kīrtana* episode of *Kīrtana.*[25] The image is finally taken back to its usual place after circumambulating seven times round the shrine. So long the image is kept on the swing it should be kept with its face turned towards the south.[26]

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[21] *Hariprasaṅga,* p. 304. Reference to its performance by Gopāla Ātā of Bhawānipur is found in *Kathā-gurucarita,* p. 406.

[22] Bhadracāru Das : *Anantarāya-carita* (Ms), vs. No. 1210-1226.

[23] A detailed description of *Dola-Yātrā* (Phalgutsava) is found in chapter 42, of the *Utkala-Khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda-Purāṇa.*

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[24] The *Oreṣā-varṇana* section of *Kīrtana* by Śaṅkaradeva describes the mythological origin of images of Jagannātha, Balabhadra, and Subradrā. The story of king Indradyumna and the installation of the images have also been described. This section of *Kīrtana* is based on description of *Brahma-purāṇa.*

[25] The *Ghuṇucā-kīrtana* episode composed by Śrīdhara Kandali, a sixteenth-century poet, deals with the story of Kṛṣṇa visiting the house of Ghuṇucā, the daughter of king Indradyumna. Ghuṇucā was betrothed to Kṛṣṇa and therefore Kṛṣṇa without the permission of Rukmiṇī paid a visit to her house. This act of Kṛṣṇa highly enraged Rukmiṇī who thereupon did not allow Kṛṣṇa and his companions to re-enter her city. Kṛṣṇa ultimately pacified her anger by paying her a compensation. The story has been derived from the *Jagannātha-purāṇa,* probably an *Upa-purāṇa.*

[26] A mock-fight on the occasion of the Holi festival prevalent around the region of Mathurā, has been noticed by W. Crooke in his *Popular Religion and Folklore.* "Handfuls of red powder mixed with glistening talc were thrown about, up to the balconies above and down on the heads of the people below : and seen through this atmosphere of coloured cloud, the frantic gestures of the throng, their white clothes and faces all stained with red and yellow patches ... ... combined to form a curious and picturesque spectacle. Then followed a mock fight between men and women conducted with perfect good humour on both sides and when it was over, many of the spectators ran into the arena and rolled over and over in the dust, taking it as the dust hallowed by the feet of Kṛṣṇa and Gopies". (p. 391).

The concluding part of the *Dola-yātrā* festival in Assam, i. e., the taking out the image of the deity in a procession symbolizing Kṛṣṇa's visis to Ghuṇcā (Guṇḍicā) is not strictly a part of the *Dola-yātrā* festival, for, in the *Utkala-khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda-purāṇa* (chapter 33-35) this incident of Kṛṣṇa's visit to Guṇḍicā has been narrated as a part of the *Ratha-yātrā* festival. In fact the *Ratha-yātrā* festival is nothing but a mimic representation of the mythological visit of Jagannātha to Ghuṇucā (Guṇḍicā). In Assam this aspect of the *Rathā-yatra* festival has merged with the *Dola-yātrā.*

The *Rāsa-yātrā* which usually takes place on the full-moon day of the month of Karttika (Oct-November) is another important festival. In some satras, notably in the Dakhiṇapāṭ satra, this festival draws a large number of people annually. It is held in honour of Kṛṣṇa's amorous dalliance with milk-maids in the autumnal season. The dual-worship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as is usually done in Rāsa-pūjā is not prevalent in satras. It is observed strictly in conformity with the narration of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* where Rādhā is conspicuous by her absence. Devotional services performed on this occasion are usually related to the *Rāsa-kṛīḍā* episode. The five chapters of the *Bhāgavata* (*Rāsa-pañcādhyāya*) are read and explained to the assembled devotees. At night Rāsa dance is performed by boys donning female costume. The play *Keligopāla-nāṭa* by Śaṅkaradeva or by some other author is also performed on this occasion.

Other festivals viz., *Ratha-yātrā, Snāna-yātrā* and *Jhulana-yātrā* are not observed in all satras. These are observed in a less conspicuous manner in principal satras of the Brahma Saṁhati. Again in some satras of the Brahma Saṁhati, ceremonies and festivals connected with *śayana, pārśva-parivarttana* and *jāgaraṇa* of Viṣṇu are observed. The *śayana* festival is observed on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight in the month of Āsāḍha. The image of the deity is carried to a tank with the accompaniment of music and song and after due worship it is requested with proper incantation to lie down and sleep in water. The *pārśvaparivarttana* festival takes place on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight in the month of Bhādra and in the same way the image which is supposed to be asleep is requested to change sides. The *jāgaraṇa* or *prabodhanī* festival is held on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Karttika and the image is similarly requested to arise and awake from sleep.[27]

The three *Bihus* observed in the last day of Āśvina, Pauṣa and Caltra are respectively known as *Kāti-bihu, Māgh-bihu* and *Bahāg-bihu*. On the day of *Kāti-bihu*, the basil plant (tulasī) is ceremoniously planted and offering of light (*dīpadāna*) to the plant constitute the special function of the day. This act of offering light continues throughout the month. On the day of *Māgh-bihu*, villagers celebrate it with bon-fires and feasts and the satras observe it with congregational prayers and music. Food prepared from newly harvested crop is offered to the deity. *Bahāg-bihu* is observed for three to seven days with special devotional programme. On the second day, i.e., the new year's day according to Indian calendar, astrological reading of the new year (*varṣāphala-gaṇana*) is made known to everybody present. Sweet disnes are offered to the deity and devotees also partake of it in honour of the new year.[28]

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[27] *Dakṣiṇpāṭ Śatrar Itivṛtta* (Ms).

Ceremonies (tithis) : Death anniversaries of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are observed with due solemnity in all satras of the Mahāpuruṣīyā order, i.e., in satras affiliated to Puruṣa, Nikā and Kāla Saṁhatis. In Barpeṭā satra, the festival connected with the death anniversary of Śaṅkaradeva is observed for seven days and that of Mādhavadeva for ten days. Mādhavadeva was the founder of Barpeṭā satra and therefore his anniversary is is considered more important than that of Śaṅkaradeva. Dramas composed by them are performed one after another in successive nights. Illumination takes place throughout the entire course of the festival. Death anniversariese of the founders of different Saṁhatis as well as of different satras are also celebrated with due pomp and honour. Satras affiliated to the Brahma Saṁhati observe anniversaries of Dāmodaradeva Bhaṭṭadeva and other principal apostles of the sub-sect. Satras of the Puruṣa Saṁhati celebrate death anniversaries of Puruṣottama Ṭhākur, Caturbhuja Ṭhākur and Kanakalatā and those affiliated to the Nikā Saṁhati observe anniversaries of Mathurādāsa Ātā and Badalā Ātā with due festivity and ceremony. The death anniversary of Gopāla Ātā is uniformly observed in all satras of the Kāla Saṁhati. Each satra again celebrates the birth and death anniversaries of its founder.

Investiture : The investiture ceremony in which the junior *adhikāra* is formally raised to the headship of a satra is one of the solemn functions of the satra institution. The ceremony is known as *nirmāli-lowā prathā*. *Burañjī-Vivekaratna* gives a detailed description of this ceremony.

When devotees and attendants of a particular satra consider the death of the head to be imminent, they formally request him to invest the junior *adhikāra* with the headship of the satra. The dying head, accordingly, orders for *nirmāli* (flowers offered to the deity), garlands and other necessary things. When everything is made ready, he gives a few instructions relating to the maintenance of the satra and finally places two garlands around the head and neck of the junior in the presence of the assembled devotees. All auspicious musical instruments are simultaneously played on, when the dying head garlands the junior *adhikāra* and offers blessings with presentation of flowers.

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[28] The word *Bihu* is connected with the Sanskrit word *viṣuva*. Originally it must have been exclusively used to mean the festival or ceremony connected with the heralding of the new year with the approach of the month of *Vaiśākha* (April-May). The *Bihu* festival is also an agricultural festival in as much as observances connected with it remind us of primitive fertility rites. The term, later on, came to be applied to mean two other agricultural festivals observed in the beginning of *Kārttika* (Oct.--November) and *Māgha* (January-February). The former marked the beginning and the latter the end of the harvesting of crops. The *Bihu* festivals seem be a synthesis or fusion of the Aryan and non-Aryan practices. The *Bahāg Bihu* is celebrated in the villages with hilarious music and daance, the *Māgh Bihu* with bon-fires and feasts and the *Kāti-Bihu* by illumination.

After the obsequial rites are over, the new *adhikāra* invites a few heads of neighbouring satras affiliated to the same Saṁhati to invest him with the position, honour and dignity of a *satrādhikāra.* The invitees formally acknowledge the new *adhikāra* by offering *nirmali* and blessings on the appointed day. The principal satras of the Brahma Saṁhati arrange an elaborate rite on this occasion. On a square-sized altar a *sarvatobhandra-maṇḍala* (mystical cycle) is drawn whereupon 108 pitchers containing consecrated water are placed and an equal number of lights (*dīpa*) is kept thereon. The person to be investitured sits with his face southward. The invitees, after sprinkling holy water and rice from the consecrated pitchers with appropriate purificatory mantras, garland the incumbent and offers him flowers previously offered to the deity. Finally instructions as to the manner of conducting himself as the head are given to the new *adhikāra.* Unless a head is formally recognised in the above manner by fellow *adhikāras* of other satras, his opinion and judgement on various religious matters may not be binding on disciples and his position in any assembly of *adhikāras* may be questioned.[29]

Special devotional functions: There are a few more devotional functions that do not come within the above categories. These are observed both in satras and households alike. They are noted below.

Bar-sabāh: The word *sabāh* is derived from Sanskrit *sabhā,* meaning an assembly. In Assamese, the word is used only in a religious context. It means a great religious congregation where devotional functions of various nature mark the proceeding of the ceremony. The greatness and grandeur of the ceremony has been well suggested in an Assamese proverb: "An impudent only, without having a single corn, desires to hold a *bar-sabāh* (*gharat nāi khudkaṇ barsabāhat man*)." The proverb is a satirical comment on the audacity of a person who, without sufficient means, thinks of performing an impossible deed. Several householders generally combine together to perform this ceremony. Satras having sound economic standing can aspire to perform it.

The ceremony usually begins in the evening and continues throughout the night. A square-size altar demarcated on four sides by plantain trees and encircled by mango foliages (*āmrapallava*), is raised in the centre of the pnadal in honour of Viṣṇu. The ceremony begins with the worship of Viṣṇu and one thousand and eight lights should be offered around the sacred altar. Things offered to the deity on this occasion should not be cut, sliced or peeled. Bananas in bunches, areca-nuts in clusters, sugarcanes without cutting into pieces are offered. A complete recitation of the thousand verses of *Nāmaghoṣā* from the beginning to the end is the special feature of this function.

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[29] Maṇirām Barbhāṇḍar Baruā : *Burañji-vivekaratna* (Ms).

Pāl-nāma: As the name *pāl* (Sk. *paryāya*=one after another) suggests, it is a type of congregational prayer lasting for a few days and continues even for a month without any break or interval. Devotees of satras participate in this function by rotation. This devotional function is usually held in the month of Bhādra and Kārttika.

Bhakat-sevā: It is a very popular function amongst the Vaiṣṇava householders, but sparingly held in satras. A few devotees are invited on a particular day to be served with food and offerings. A prayer-service is usually arranged on such an occasion. Esoteric practices sometimes accompany the prayer service. The serving of devotees with food and offerings is not only considered as a meritorious act but it is supposed to allay evil influence of planets and spirits of departed ancestors.

Fasts: Vaiṣṇava writers have expressed in their different works that religious fasts are of no avail if they are not accompanied by Bhakti. But they have not altogether ruled out the necessity of observing religious fast. Śaṅkaradeva censured a few of his disciples including Mādhavadeva for non-observance of fast on the day of *ekādaśī*[30] (11th day of every lunar fortnight). Therefore, in practice we find that fasts specially on the eleventh and the last day of every lunar fortnight are observed by all sections of Vaiṣṇavas. No distinction is made between *ekādaśī* of the dark and bright fortnights and between *amāvasyā* (last day of the dark fortnight) and *purṁimā* (full moon) days. Besides the usual *ekādaśī* days, there are a few important *ekādaśīs,* which, it is believed, beget higher merit if properly observed. *Nirjalā ekādaśī* on the eleventh day of the bright lunar fortnight in the month of Jaistha (May-June), *śayana ekādaśī* in the same lunar day in the month of Māgha (Jan.-February)—all these days should be observed with fasting and night vigil. *Nṛsiṁha caturdaśī* on the fourteenth day of the bright lunar fortnight in the month of Vaiśākha (April-May) is also observed by fasting.

Then again, fast is observed on *tithis* (death anniversaries) of principal Vaiṣṇava reformers. Disciples of a particular satra observe fast on the occasion of the death anniversaries of their Guru. Reference to fasting by disciples on the death of their Guru is found in biographies of Dāmodaradeva and Vaṁśīgopāladeva.[31] References to the observance of other types of fast noted above are found in abundance in *Kathā-guru-carita.*[32]

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[30] Daityāri Ṭhākur : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita*, p. 116.

[31] Rāmarāya : *Gurulīlā* p. 187; Nīlakantha : *Dāmodara-carita*, p. 176; Ramānanda : *Vaṁśīgopāladevar carita*, p. 214.

[32] *Kathā-gurucarita*, pp. 113, 414, 504.

Unorthodox Practices: Towards the beginning of the eighteenth century a few unorthodox and esoteric practices found their way into the religious fold of some minor satras. Of these unorthodox practices a few may be noted here.

One of these practices is called *arītīyā-mat* or *rātikhowā-prathā*. It is called *arītīyā* because it is not sanctioned by traditional laws and custom (*rīti*=custom) and *rātikhowā* because it is associated with nocturnal enjoyment. The followers of this practice indulge in nocturnal feasts, music, dance and wine-drinking in the name of some religious rites. The origin of these nocturnal rites is spuriously ascribed to Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. According to *Bhaviṣya-saṁgraha* (c. 18th century) by Kṛṣṇānanda Dvija, the left-handed esoteric practices observed in the inner circle of these devotees (*bhitarpakiyā-bhakat*) consist of three types viz., *Aṅkilā, Sambalā* and *Lampaṭā.* In *Aṇkilā-bhakti* no restriction in respect of food and eatables is observed and therefore prohibited things, such as pork and wine are freely consumed. *Sambalā-bhakti* consists of sexual enjoyment. *Lampaṭā-bhakti* is the culmination of the above two.[33]

These pseudo-vaiṣṇavite night-worshippers are known by different local names such as *Purṇabhagīyā, Madhupurīyā, Batibhagīyā* and *Bhitarpakīyā* etc. There may be certain local variations among them in respect of rites and observances, but the common feature that marks all these local manifestations of the night-worshippers is the extreme secrecy in their esoteric bacchanalia. It should not, however, be supposed that the adherents of these unorthodox order indulge in those nocturnal revelries only for the sake of gross sensual pleasure. They rather observe them with full religious faith that theirs is the true devotional way originally revealed by Vaiṣṇavite saints like Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and Gopāladeva. They call their path of devotion as Kevalā Bhakti. Chanting and singing accompany all their observances, and the songs are invariably of mystic type resembling to a certain extent mystic songs (*dohās*) of the Sahajayānī Buddhists. Macrocosm in microcosm, position of plexuses (*cakra*), and veins (*nāḍīs*) in the body, the process of moving the serpent power (*kundalinī śakti*), the futility of worldly existence and efficacy of Kevalā-Bhakti are some of the topics frequently dealt with in the songs sung by the night-worshippers. From the prominence given to Śiva and the use of rosary of rudrāksa beads it can be surmised that Tantric Śaivism directly or indirectly influenced the development of this heterodox order. Women-folk play an equal part in all their ceremonies and they are considered as human representative of the primal energy (Prakṛti). According to them, as puruṣa without Prakṛti is incapable of creation, so the male-folk representing Puruṣa cannot attain perfection in esoteric devotion without conjunction with the women-folk who are termed as *Bhakti-matṛ* (Mother Devotion).

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[33] Kṛṣṇānanda Dvija : *Bhaviṣya-saṁgraha*, published by Haliram Hājarikā, p. 9ff.

These night-worshippers use symbolical language to denote different things of their religious ceremonies. The state of ecstatic devotion is called *rasa* and the Guru is called a dealer in *rasa* (*rasar dokānī*). The word *rasa* is also in prevalence to indicate wine used in their ceremonies. Their different types of bacchanalian performance like dancing and miming is called *vihara*. Looking into its heterogenous elements that constitute its beliefs and practices it may be surmised that the cult of night-worshipper is an admixture of Tāntricism, Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism.

In *Tuṅgkhuṅgiā Burañji*, it is stated that one Pānimuwā, a night-worshipper, was put to death for an alleged conspiracy against the Ahom king Kamaleswara Siṁha. In course of the investigation it was revealed that the heads of a few satras were also members of the free-masonry to which Pānimuwā was attached. The head of the Kāṭnipār Satra affiliated to the Kāla Saṁhati was found guilty of indulging in those nocturnal practices and he was, therefore, expelled from the kingdom. *Medhis* of various satras working in villages were ordered to inform the royal authorities as soon as persons indulging in those practices were found in their villages.[34]

Probably a class of pseudo-Vaiṣṇavas claiming themselves followers of Śaṅkaradeva and initiating disciples in the name of some satras had been in existence from the time of Mādhavadeva or even before. In *Nāmaghoṣā*, Mādhavadeva refers to this class of free-masons in the following way: "There are persons who putting on the cloak of Vaiṣṇavism roam about transgressing the path laid down by the Vedas. They indiscriminately indulge in the enjoyment of sex and palate and thus put unnecessary impediment on the path of devotion."[35] In *Vaṁśgopāladevar Carita*, such persons have been termed as *Baudhas*. Vaṁśigopāladeva was greatly harassed by these *Baudhas*. According to the above work they did not observe Hindu rites and freely indulged themselves in all sorts of gross pleasures.[36] These were probably the adherents of debased Tantric Buddhism. They, later on, switched off to Vaiṣṇavism, and tantric practices so long observed by them probably went underground and same were observed as secret rites. These rites, apparently attractive, mainly thrived amongst the backward classes. Satras that worked and preached amongst these backward people were influenced in turn by their secret rites. Consequently the *arītīyā-mat* noted above found its place as a secret practice in a few satras of interior places.[37]

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[34] S. K. Bhuyan (edited): *Tuṅgkhuṅgiā Burañji* p. 161f.

[35] Mādhavadeva : *Nāmaghoṣā*, verse 295.

[36] Ramānanda : *Vaṁśgopāladevar Carita*, pp. 54f, 161, 162.

[37] Maṇirām Barbhāṇḍar Baruā in his *Burañji-vivekaratna* refers to the exis-

The other practice that found its way into the religious fold of a few satras is known as *gopīdharā prathā.* Its peculiar characteristic is that female devotees are to consider themselves as gopis of Vṛndāvana and the Guru as Kṛṣṇa. Men and women are here conceived as temporal manifestation of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, the eternal male and the female, the perennial enjoyer and the enjoyed. At the time of initiation, female devotees are instructed to surrender themselves absolutely to the Guru and serve him in the same manner as gopis of Vṛndāvana had served Kṛṣṇa. It is apparent that the tenet is against the type of devotion advocated and preached by the Vaiṣṇava reformers of Assam. The erotic sentiment based on the relation between a lover and his beloved, which has been made the basis of devotion advocated by the School of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, was deprecated by the Assamese reformers on social grounds. Because of its affinity with the *Kiśorī bhajan* system of Bengal, it may be inferred that the practice owes its origin to the above practice of Bengal which probably entered Assam in the eighteenth century along with musicians, artists and religious persons imported by king Rudra Siṁha.[38]

From the foregoing narratives it becomes clear that the Vaiṣṇava faith and movement which was initiated with the idea of establishing a simpler mode of worship open to all, no doubt, achieved its objective to a considerable extent in the first century of its history during which simplicity marked its practices. But with the growth and development of its institutional side, it became gradually enmeshed in formalities and its ceremonies connected with initiation, ordination and devotional practices took a ritualistic turn. On the other hand, it must be admitted that these ceremonies helped the new faith to place it on a systematic foundation, gave it a dignified appearance and finally tended to bring about discipline and order in the religious life.

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tence of this practice in Cecā, Calihā Budbārī, Kāṭanipār and Tiphook satras of Eastern Assam. It should be remembered that these satras have for their disciples mostly tribal people. Tradition current amongst the Vaiṣṇavite circle also supports the statement of *Burañjī-vivekaratna.* But the above satras categorically deny it.

[38] Prevalence of this practice has been testified by the late M. C. Bardaloi's report on the religious sects in Assam, 1904, to the Ethnological Department, Government of Assam. The Report has been preserved in the library of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Gauhati.

Koābhāturi, a satirical work written by the late Hemchandra Barua in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, gives a lurid picture of this practice resorted to by a *satrādhikara.* The characters are no doubt fictitious, but the practice depicted is based on facts. The late S. C. Goswami in his article *Vaiṣṇavism in Assam,* J. A. R. S., vol. I, No. 2., also refers to the existence of this practice in a limited number of satras. Because of general contempt for this practice, the satras which were known to have practised it, now deny it altogether.

CHAPTER VII

CUSTOMS AND MANNERS

In the preceding chapter, daily and occasional observances in satras and households have been noted. In this chapter, customs and manners observed by devotees and monks attached to satras will be discussed briefly in order to complete the picture of a satra institution. As regards the Vaiṣṇava householders, there is nothing peculiar in their outward show which could distinguish them from those of other sects but for their frontal marks of sandal paste. But devotees, who lead an intensely devotional life by keeping a close connection with their satras and Gurus, a part of whom are celibates living within the four walls of satra campus, are worthy of special consideration.

Celibacy: The first thing to strike our notice is the practice of celibacy. How celibacy came into vogue has been discussed in the third chapter. Here, it is necessary to state that it is not a general practice prevalent in all satras. In satras situated in Majuli (an island of the Brahmaputra) and in a few other satras, the practice has been in vogue. Excepting a few purely monastic satras like Āuniāti, Dakṣiṇapāṭ and Garamūr, where the inmates residing permanently within the satra premises must be celibates, celibacy is optional in the case of other satras. Even in those satras where the inmates are required to be celibates they can at any time, if they desire, marry. But in that case, they forfeit the right of residing as inmates of the satra. Married persons can however reside within the proximity of a monastic satra and have the benefit of participating in religious discussions and prayers. In satras like Barpeṭā and Pātbāusi, there are separate provision for lodging married and celibate devotees. Therefore, whenever a celibate gets himself married he can take his lodging in the line reserved for married devotees.

Women are, no doubt, allowed to have initiation and can enter monastic satras at day-time. But they are never allowed to stay at night and at the time of initiation also celibate-heads of satras while initiating them are not allowed by custom to look at the face of woman. The celibate-heads usually conduct the process of initiation from behind a screen. In semi-monastic or *gṛhasthi* satras separate exit and entrance for the female exist and they cannot take part in religious functions organised by and intended for the males.

The life of a purely monastic satra, where none but celibates are allowed to stay, is however not absolutely cenobitical. The celibates live in separate huts where they sleep and dine in their own way. The caste distinction is scrupulously maintained in matter of dining and social practices. A Brahmin does not take food cooked and served by a non-Brahmin. Certain ecclesiastical offices are exclusively held by Brahmins, for instance, none but a Brahmin can serve as a *Pūjārī* (worshipper) of the image of the deity installed in the satra. But in granting status or dignity to devotees, no discrimination is made between a Brahmin and a non-Brahmin. A non-Brahmin may hold an ecclesiastical office of higher status than the one held by a Brahmin. All devotees irrespective of caste, meet together in the prayer services and take their position according to their ecclesiastical status. Usually the Brahmins are engaged in distributing offerings (*naivedya*) to the deity after the prayer-services are over, but there is no bar in employing non-Brahmins of higher sub-castes for the above purpose. In fact, they are employed almost in all satras to serve uncooked offerings to all alike.

Maintenance: Celibates residing within the satra compus, like the monks of Benedictine monasteries, are required as a rule to work with their own hands and to do the necessary works of cooking and washing for themselves. But in practice, they often perform these with the help of the juniors attached to them. The intervals between the different prayers-services are utilised by engaging themselves in some sort of handicrafts.

In the formative stage of the satra institution when regular income derived from tithes and grants from kings was not forth-coming, devotees choosing to remain within the campus of satra had to maintain themselves partly by begging and partly by utilising the presents given by votaries and visitors from villages. *Carita-puthis* dealing with lives of Vaiṣṇava reformers contain instances from which it can be ascertained that most of the celibate devotees maintained themselves by resorting to begging. Gopāla Ātā, the founder of the Kāla saṁhati, advised his disciples to maintain themselves by begging alms and to discard the habit of hoarding for the future.[1] From the *Kathā-gurucarita* it is known that inmates of the early-established satras like those of Barpeṭā and Madhupur constructed their own huts and also lent their services for the construction of shrines and prayer halls of their respective satras at the initial stage. They had to look to their daily needs also. They husked paddy, brought fuel from the wood, cleansed utensils and worked for the sanitation of their satra-campus. The magnificent prayer hall of the Barpeṭā satra was constructed under the supervision of Mādhavadeva by the labour of devotees alone. When it was formally opened with a grand festival where hundreds of people assembled Mathurādāsa Ātā, one of the leading disciple of Mādhavadeva, practically did the work of a scavenger when he removed the filth and garbage of the place that had accumulated during the course of the festival.[2]

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[1] Pūrnānanda & Rāmānanda : *Gopāla-Ātā-carita*, p. 285.

With the attainment of the material prosperity consequent upon the prevalence of the system of paying tithes to the satra and of grants by the kings, the problem of maintenance of celibate devotees was solved and the necessity of begging ceased to exist. But the amount of manual labour that was necessary in preparing food, cleansing utensils and other day-to-day activities of life was still done by the celibates themselves and some of them, as noted above, utilized the intervals between different prayer services in pursuit of some useful crafts.

Food: Vaiṣṇavas of Assam are scrupulously careful in taking food, so much so, that food cooked by a person of the same caste or sub-caste is not taken by another, unless the former is an initiated one and belongs to the same order. There are extreme cases where one member of a family is seen refusing to take food prepared by another. The *carita-puthis* contains many illustrations where the husband had refused to take food cooked by the wife because the latter was uninitiated.[3] Earthen pots are usually used for cooking purposes so that those could be discarded after one meal. But where earthen pots are not easily available or when the discarding of pots everyday appears to be costly, utensils made of brass or bell metals are used in view of their durability.

Fish and meat (with a·certain exception) are not taboos. Almost all the reformers including Śaṇkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were non-vegetarians. The *carita puthis* have given minute details of their lives from which it is known that fish and meat were not considered prohibited things for Vaiṣṇavas. Vaiṣṇavas should not indulge in killing animals for the purpose of food but they can take meat of animals killed by others. Incidents narrated in *Kathāgurucarita* as well as in the *Vaṁśīgopāladevar Carita* regarding the use of fish may not be out of place here to mention. Vaṁśīgopāladeva was a celibate Brahmin and was a vegetarian. Once when he visited the house of Śaṇkaradeva (who was then no longer alive), the latter's wife deliberately served him with fish without his knowledge. Vaṁśīgopāladeva was, later on, informed of the fact and it was also explained to him that the Vaiṣṇava religion preached by Śaṅkaradeva was not a religion for *yati, sannyāsin* and *brahmacārīn;* it was intended for ordinary folk who could not be expected to give up fish and meat which form two of the principal items of diet. Self-mortification or self-deprivation on the one hand and the self-indulgence on the other must be avoided according to this cult.

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[2] U. C. Lekhāru (edited) : *Kathā-gurucarita,* pp. 353-358, 376.

[3] *Kathā-gurucarita,* pp. 42, 277.

In this respect, Assamese Vaiṣṇavas have been following a middle path. "A celibate devotee should be a tight-rope walker balancing his way between the twin abysses of laxity and excessive austerity." Of course all kinds of meat have not been sanctioned; there are many exceptions. If in some satras the Gurus and devotees or disciples are not in the habit of taking meat and fish, it is not because of any prohibition but simply as a matter of convention.

The chewing of *tāmbūla* (areca-nut) together with betel-leaf, lime and tobacco is largely in vogue. Areca-nut and betel leaf have a definite place in all religious and ceremonial functions. Guests are entertained primarily by offering *tāmbūla* with betel leaf. Whenever forgiveness for some faults is to be asked or an invitation is to be sent, a trayful of *tāmbūla* and *pāṇ* (*tāmol-pāṇar śarāi*) is offered to the person concerned. This practice of offering trays containing *tāmol-pāṇ* in all devotional and socials dealings is widely prevalent in satras and villages. It is narrated in *Burañjī-vivekaratna* that a disciple of Māyāmarā satra at the time of initiation is required to offer a betel-leaf (*pān*) as a token of dedication of his life (*prāṇa*) to the Guru. To receive a piece of *tāmol* with a betel-leaf from a revered or respected person is considered as an act of great favour shown the receiver. Milk and its products are very liberally used. All vegetables, with few exceptions only, are allowed, but irritant and excitant food is generally eschewed by the inmates of a satra in the interest of celibacy.

Offerings: Except in the case of image-worship performed in accordance with Brahminical rites, all the *upacāras* numbering sixteen are not necessary in other forms of worship or devotional practices. *Pañcopacāras* (*gandha, puṣpa, dhūpa, dīpa* and *naivedya*) are sufficient enough for an ordinary devotional rite. Of the five *upacāras,* the offering of *naivedya* is considered to be of vital importance. *Naivedya* usually consists of softened gram, mug pulse, rice, banana, sugarcanes cut into pieces, betel-nuts and other palatable things that could be offered uncooked. The softened or germinated gram (*gāji*) and pulses mixed with rice are considered the main elements of *naivedya,* others are mere accessories. Nothing that is cooked or boiled is generally offered.

Things offered to the deity or articles used in any ceremony are supposed to have some symbolical significance. Devotees ignorant of these symbolical significance, it is believed, do not get the full merit for partaking of the offerings. This assignment of symbolical meaning is called *tattva-vicāra.* To quote a few, the canopy hung over the image stands for the hood of the mythological serpent Śeṣa (Ananta) and the light that burns before the image stands for knowledge. The plantain leaves used for distributing offerings symbolise Bhakti and *naivedya* signifies the grace of God. In this way, everything used or offered to the deity in a devotional ceremony has been linked up or associated with the Vaiṣṇava cult.

Dress and other articles of use : Usually a celibate devotee attached to a satra uses three pieces of white cloth, a *dhoti* (loin cloth), a *cādar* (wrapper) and a *gāmochā* (towel). These three pieces of cloths are indispensably and invariably used by all sections of devotees. On ceremonial occasions the devotees residing within a satra put on a bodice or a waist-coat (*caugā*) or a long, flowing garment (*cāpkan*). Heads of satras put on turbans when they go out of the satra-campus. Coloured clothes are never in use. Ordinarily, garments made of cotton are used, but silk garments also are not infrequently seen to be used by devotees. In early days of the Vaiṣṇava movement, the reformers insisted on the simplicity of garment. In biographies of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva and other reformers we frequently find references to three pieces of cloths worn by them,—(I) *bhuṇi* (dhoti), (II) *pacarā* (wrapper), and (III) *dopāti* (a cloth or a wrapper folded double). No reference to the use of the head-dress or bodice is found. Gopāla Ātā of Bhawānipur advised his followers to put on tattered garments.[4] The use of bodice, waist-coat (*cauga*), and the long shirt (*cāpkan*) most probably came to be used by *adhikāras* and other dignitaries of the satra in imitation of royal officers when contacts with the royal court came to be frequent. The head-dress (*pāg*) also came to be in use when contact with the royal court developed.

Instead of wooden furniture of various height, blankets (*thaṅgā*), rush-mats and mattresses (*kaṭh, pāṭi* and *dharā*) made of grass, bamboo-slits, matrush and ribs of withered plantain leaves, have been in use in all satras. High stools are never used. It is told in *Kathā-gurucarita* that Mādhavadeva introduced and insisted on the use of a type of rough mattress made of withered ribs of plantain leaves.[5] It is further narrated in the *Gopāla-Āta-carita* that once a disciple gave Gopāla Ātā a fine mat for his use. The reformer set the mat on fire remarking, "When my Guru could pass his life using a rough mat of plantain ribs, why should I take up a finer one ? Do you think, the attainment of Bhakti is possible only by using a cosy seat ?"[6] Even today soft cushion is rarely used in any of the existing satras by *adhikāras* and devotees. It cannot be denied, however, that satras which received patronage from kings and nobles in the latter stage of the Vaiṣṇavite history of Assam, introduced certain things of luxury like valuable gems and ornaments and utensils, etc., but those were not intended for the use of devotees or monks ; those were intended for the use of images installed in the satras or for decorations on festive occasions like *bhāonā*. Footwears of hide or skin have never been in use ; instead, wooden footwears (*pādukā*) and sandals made of coir

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[4] *Gopāla-Ātā-carita*, pp. 265, 285.

[5] *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 132.

[6] Pūrnānanda & Rāmānanda : *Gopāla-Ātā-carita*,p. 248.

(*phānati*) are commonly used and a kind of indigenous sun-shade (*jāpi*) made of palm leaves (*takau-pāṭ*) has been in use from earliest times. Umbrella (*chatra, arowān*) was considered a privileged thing of kings and nobles only. Heads of the most orthodox satras do not, even today, use any mechanical conveyance of modern times. *Dolā,* a kind of sedan chair carried on by two men on their shoulders, was the usual land-conveyance used by the satra-heads. The elephant and horse were also sometimes used. Boats of various designs were kept for the purpose of transport as well as for amusements and races conducted in satras.

The celibate devotees or monks living within a satra are in the habit of keeping long hair, and like the fair sex they tie their trailing hair to the back of the head. They are clean-shaven, and the keeping of beard and moustache is against their tradition; nor matted hair (*jaṭā*) like that of ascetics is allowed. *Kathā-gurucarita* refers to Paḍhiyā Ātai and Jatirām who were accepted to the fold of Vaiṣṇavism only after they had cut off their matted looks and had cleanly shaven their faces.[7]

Assamese Vaiṣṇavites of all sub-sects have no special frontal mark which apparnetly distinguishes one sect of Vaiṣṇavas from the other. A simple circular mark or two vertical lines of sandal paste on the forehead forming a semi-circular curve in the juncture of the eye-brows are seen to be in common practice. The latter type of frontal mark is more widely prevalent amongst the Brahmins. Rosaries and garlands made of basil-stem and leaves are commonly worn around head and neck. Wreaths prepared from fragrant leaves of *damana* plant are profusely used.

Sacramental relationship: Under the topic, two types of relationship, i.e., (i) between the *adhikāra* and devotees and (ii) among the devotees themselves will be discussed.

(i) The *adhikāra* as the head of the religious community naturally commands respect and obedience. Moreover, as the spiritual guide and guardian, he is placed almost on an equal footing with the deity. His enviable position is based neither on legal nor on physical strength, but on moral and religious grounds. Vaiṣṇavite works have waxed eloquent on the merits of serving one's Guru. As the *adhikāra* is invariably the Guru also he is, therefore, regarded as the representative of God. Theoretically, the ceremony of initiation (*śaraṇa*), which purports to lay all that belong to the communicant at the feet of the Guru, may tend to make the former a creature of the latter for the rest of his life. In practice also, the disciples of the satras affiliated to Kāla Saṁhati are taught to look upon their Guru as the God incarnate. According to the sect, the propitiation of the Guru automatically leads to the propitiation of God also. The

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[7] *Kathā-gurucarita,* pp. 119, 320.

carita-puthis contain incidents, too numerous to quote, of untold sufferings undergone by devotees for the sake of their Gurus. The Guru *cum* adhikāra is looked upon as the human-God and therefore, he is addressed as *Prabhu-Jagannātha* (Lord of the world), *Prabhu-Īśvara* (the ruler of the world). *Ātā-Īśvara* (Lord of the self) and so on according to the traditional method of address prevalent in each satra. An *adhikāra* of a satra is usually referred to as *Gosāin-Īśvara* by villagers, even though the particular *adhikāra* may not be their religious head. He is also addressed or referred to as *Ātā* (Ātmā), though the term *Ātā* is applicable, according to the Vaiṣṇavite tradition, only to those who were specially delegated by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva to preach the faith and initiate or ordain disciples. The present relation between the Guru and the devotees has become more or less stereotyped in nature and depends, to a certain extent, on material consideration also. But in the early stages of the Vaiṣṇava movement the relationship as revealed through the narratives of the *carita-puthis* was of ideal type. The outward formalities are still present but the spirit seems to be gradually waning owing to the onslaught of the present material civilization.

(ii) The relationship between one devotee and another could be imagined from the attitude shown towards different kinds of offences against devotees. According to Vaiṣṇava scriptures, an offence against the deity or Guru is redeemable in certain circumstances, but an offence (*droha*) against a devotee, no matter how insignificant position he might hold, is unpardonable and beyond redemption.[8] All the biographies of Vaiṣṇava reformers and proselytisers contain anecdotes or accounts wherein this particular aspect has been discussed. It has been narrated in the *Kathā-gurucarita* that Śaṅkaradeva once advised his disciples not to commit any offence against a bhakta, for, an offence against the Guru could be redeemed by the holy association of devotees but an offence against a bhakta is beyond redemption. The Guru cannot pardon such an offence. It is further narrated in the above work that Mādhavadeva expelled from his sect two of his disciples for abusing and assaulting devotees.[9] Gopāla Ātā was reproved by Mādhavadeva for raising his finger in course of a heated discussion with one of his friends in the following words :—"Whoever raises his finger against a devotee, his finger should be chopped off."[10] Mādhavadeva refused to accept the presents sent by the queen-mother of Cooch-Behar for her discriminatory behaviour to the devotees staying with him.[11] The same tradition of respecting a devotee even under great provocation has continued till today in satras. A senior devotee or a monk behaves a junior one with utmost civility. Every devotee, irrespective of his age, is addressed as *ātai*. The term *ātā* and *ātai* though related to the same Sanskrit word *ātman* are not synonymous. The former is a more exalted and dignified term, while the latter is more plebeian in significance. Disciples affiliated to the same satra are linked up by the same religious bond and this bond in former times had far-reaching effect on social activities also. For instance, in selecting a bride or a bridegroom, girls or boys belonging to families owning allegiance to the same satra or at least to the same Saṁhati, used to receive comparatively more favourable consideration than those having allegiance to other satras.

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[8] *Sātvata-tantra*, p. 61ff.

[9] *Kathā-gurucarita*, pp. 99, 369.

[10] Pūrnānanda & Rāmānanda : *Gopāla-Ātā-carita*, p. 236.

[11] Daityāri Ṭhākur : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-carita*, pp. 375-376.

When two or more persons are initiated simultaneously by the same *satrādhikāra,* a sort of sacramental brotherhood is established between the persons thus initiated. They generally address each other as *hari-bhakat* (fellow devotee of Hari) and if they happened to be married persons, the son or the daughter of one could not marry that of the other. The children of one sacramental brother usually address the latter as *tāwai* (<*tāta*) and his wife as *āmai* (<*ambā*). The impurity connected with the death of one sacramental brother devolves on the other also and the duration of such impurity is one day. He should take ablution on receipt of the news of the death, and fasting should be observed as well. The Brahmins should change their sacred thread also.

Manners: In manners and dealings, persons living in the atmosphere of a satra are proverbially polite and highly polished. A devotee popularly known as *satriyā-bhakat* never speaks in term of the first person, in as much as it indicates egoism. For instance, if a *satriyā-bhakat* is asked, "Have you done it ?", he will never say, 'Yes, I have done it'. He will instead reply, "By the grace of the Almighty and by your blessings, it has been done". The use of the first person in singular number is rarely seen. In case of dire necessity they will rather use 'we' or 'ours'. One will be surprised to hear their uniform use of sentences in passive voice in mutual discussions or talks. There is a class of vocables, highly polished or euphemistic in nature, the use of which is mainly confined within the satra circle. The following few illustrations will serve as specimens.

St. Assamese.	Satrīya form.
teõlok (they)	—*terāsava*
eõlok (these persons)	—*erāsava*
bhāt (boiled rice)	—*cāul-sijowā.*
jalakiyā (black pepper)	—*bhojan-ṭhelā*
śauc (call of nature) :	—*bāhir phurā.*

Uttering of one or the other of the names of Viṣṇu, such as Rāma, Hari etc. in midst of every sentence is a sort of mannerism with most devotees.

They remain scrupulously neat and clean and do not chew even a *pāṇ* or a *tāmbula* without taking their morning bath. An extreme case of the habit of cleanliness may be noticed in their act of washing or dipping even firewoods in water before they are actually put to fire. This is too much, no doubt, and rather be called a mania for cleanliness, but it at least points to their over-zealous attitude towards purity or cleanliness.

Offence and punishment: Religious offences against the four fundamental principles have already been dealt with in the third chapter. Besides the religious offences enumerated in the above chapter, there are offences against the vaiṣṇavite order and society as well. How these offences were treated and what were the forms of punishment meted to the offenders and how they are at present treated in satras deserve consideration. For lack of regular codes or rules governing conduct of devotees, like *vinaya* rules of Buddhism, we do not find any uniform and consistent set of rules and procedure being followed in so many satras. A careful study of the medieval biographical literature would reveal that certain offences were considered very serious and anybody committing such offences was liable for expulsion from the order. Adultery, theft, assault and moral turpitudes of serious nature were severely dealt with and persons found guilty were expelled from the order. Mādhavadeva expelled from his satra one Haricaraṇa on the mere suspicion of adultery.[12] Another person Kṛṣṇa by name was similarly expelled from Madhupura satra at Cooch-Behar. Puruṣottama Ṭhākur, grandson of Śaṅkaradeva, was boycotted by devotees residing in that satra for his attempt to give shelter to a guilty person.[13] Whoever was found to be involved in theft was similarly punished. Gopāla Ātā expelled from his satra one Śivadasa for stealing. Again, persons found to be involved in assaulting one another received expulsion orders from the reformers. Mādhavadeva is said to have expelled two of his disciples for mutual assault. Indulgence in lying, libelling, back-biting, slandering and abusing etc. were pardoned after having reprimanded them and having realized a certain amount of fine from the offenders.[14] Śaṅkaradeva is stated to have refused to look at the face of one Udara Govinda for nine months for telling a lie. He was pardoned after nine months when he found him sincerely repentant for his action. On the other hand, candid confession of any guilt, even of serious nature, was highly appreciated. An extreme case has been narrated in the *Kathā-gurucarita*. A certain celibate disciple of Mādhavadeva was forced by a young woman to have sexual intercourse with her by threatening to commit suicide in the presence of the said disciple. He came back and reported everything with penitent voice to Mādhavadeva. He, however, not only pardoned him but highly appreciated his moral courage for speaking out the truth.[15]

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[12] *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 399.

[13] Pūrnānanda & Rāmānanda : *Gopāla-Ātā-carita*, pp. 80ff.

[14] *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 369.

Besides the moral offences indicated above, there are certain kind of offences which may be termed sectarian. Worshipping of gods or goddesses other than Viṣṇu was considered an act of grave misconduct. The designation of the faith, viz., *Ekaśaranīyā-dharma* (the religion of unique surrender to one) precludes the worship of any other god than Viṣṇu. Anybody guilty of this religious offence was severely dealt with by the reformers and proselytisers. Biographies mention that Śaṅkaradeva expelled one of his important followers, Vyāsakalāi Sarmā, for worshipping Kāli even though he resorted to it in sheer desperation and with a view to saving, if possible, his eldest son from imminent death from pox. Though Vyāsakalāi later on sicerely repented for his conduct and was even ready to pay a big sum of money as an atonement, Śaṅkaradeva did not receive him back to his fold.[16] Mādhavadeva also in the like manner expelled one Parhiyā Mādhava for taking part in the worship of Durgā, but he was received back a few months later when it was known that the person did not attend the function intentionally.[17] Similar cases are found almost in all biographies.

Devotees found to be indulging in the practice of magic, charms and sorcery were also severely dealt with. Absolute faith in God without any diversion, whatsoever, should be the ideal of devotees. The *Kathā-gurucarita* tells us that Mādhavadeva drove out from his satra one Dhirāi Ātai who used to practise sorcery.[18] Daityāri Ṭhākur mentions in his work that once Mādhavadeva agreed to receive back to his sect a few devotees who had gone to witness the feats of a Yogi only after they had undergone a course of eight-day penance in the shape of fast and prayer.[19] Addiction to opium-eating, smoking and drinking was never tolerated. The last vice, i.e. the habit of drinking wine is nowhere to be found amongst the devotees. The mediaeval biographical literature has not referred to a single case of this kind. References to the other two vices are found, though rarely, in a few biographies. Ananta Ātā of the Narowā satra in course of his advice to his disciples told : "Take it from me, that whoever indulges in smoking will forfeit my favour. Not to speak of merit, he will lose his caste also."[20]

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[15] Daityāri Ṭhākur, : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhava-carita,* p. 246f.
[16] *Kathā-gurucarita,* p. 371.
[17] *Kathā-gurucarita,* p. 322.
[18] Ibid, p. 383.
[19] Daityāri Ṭhākur, : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhava-carita,* p. 332.
[20] Bhadracāru Dasa : *Anantarāya-carita* (transcript No. 52, D.H.A.S).

According to one medieval biography of Śaṅkaradeva, it is narrated that he removed one Sūrya Śarasvatī from the office of the *Bhāgavatī* for his addiction to opium.[21]

Even today, satras of monastic type try to maintain purity in the moral and religious spheres by enforcing strict discipline. Acts of moral turpitude and religious delinquency are not tolerated and devotees involved in offences are required not only to pay monetary fine but they run the risk of being expelled from the satra compound. Punishment generally meted out to guilty devotees are monetary fine, excommunication and religious expiation (*prāyaścitta*). In monastic satras the usual punishment for a grave offence is expulsion from the satra campus. In every satra of the some standing there is a sort of council consisting of senior devotees with *adhikāra* as the presiding member, which decides such cases and pronounce judgment according to the nature of the crime. Innocence or guilt of a person accused of committing an offence of which no evidence is available, is generally determined by taking recourse to the process of swearing. If the suspected person could swear by God touching the holy altar or the throne in the prayer-hall in the presence of the *satrādhikara* and other devotees that he is innocent, then he is absolved from the alleged guilt. In some monastic satras, notably in the principal satras of Majuli, guilty devotees are sometimes kept in confinement for several days in a room specially built for that purpose. Reference to such confinement is not found in older biographies, but one eighteenth century biography, *Rāmagopāla-carita* by Jayanārāyaṇa states that while the raiding army of Gadādhara Siṁha attacked the satra of Rāmagopāla at Āhātguri, the condemned devotees locked up in a cell were set at liberty by the royal soldiers.[22]

In *gṛhasthi* satras where the organizational side is not perfect and rules are more flexible, we do not find such a strict enforcement of discipline. It is only in monastic satras like Āuniāti, Dakhiṇapāṭ, Barpetā and kamalābārī, traditional rules and codes of discipline are strictly followed.

Marriage and obsequial rites: The celibate monks or devotees are not required to take a vow of perpetual celibacy. They can, if they desire, come back to the house-holder's life and marry. The practice of intercaste marriage has never been sanctioned or allowed amongst the Vaiṣṇavas of Assam. Anybody guilty of such marriage is socially boycotted. Amongst the higher castes and subcastes viz., the Brahmins, Kāyasthas, Kalitās, Keõts and Kochas, the marriage ceremony is performed accordiny to śāstric rites conducted by Brahmin priests. But amongst the socially backward subcastes and Hinduised non-Aryan tribes, the Brahminical marriage system is not uniformly prevalent : it is performed, in most cases, in accordance with the traditional or tribal custom supplemented by Vaiṣṇavite *nāmakīrtana* observance. In the past, it was the custom with Vaiṣṇavite families, though the custom no longer holds good, to send the bride and the bride-groom soon after their marriage to a satra with a pair of cloth as offering with a view to invoking blessings from the Gosain and get themselves initiated if they were not initiated before. A daughter-in-law is not entitled to cook food or serve meal to the family members, specially to the superiors, unless she is initiated by the family Gosain.

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[21] *Santa-carita* : (Ms. No. 449A, D.H.A.S.) V. 65.

[22] Jayanārāyaṇa : *Rāmgopāla-carita* (Transcript No. 113, D.H.A.S.).

When a Vaiṣṇava dies, his dead body is cremated and not buried. If, due to some unavoidable reasons it could not be cremated, the body is exhumated a few months later and the bones of the buried person are formally cremated. This practice is, however, not confined to the Vaiṣṇava community alone ; it is equally true of all other Hindu communities of Assam. Impurity connected with the death of an adult member of a family lasts for ten days in case of the Brahmins, twelve days in case of the Kṣatriyas and a month in case of the Śūdras. Purificatory rites and rituals and oblations offered to the deceased are performed according to the Brahminical system. But recently, there has been a move among certain sections of the non-Brahmins to do away with the Brahminical rites and rituals prescribed in the Dharma-śāstras and to limit the period of impurity from one month to ten or twelve days. This move has found a considerable number of followers. They are trying to replace the Brahminical rituals by simple devotional prayers.

A few preliminary auspicious rites of purely Vaiṣṇavite character are performed immediately before the death of a Vaiṣṇava and before the dead body is taken out for cremation. When the inmates of a family or of a satra perceive that the death is imminent to an ailing member, the latter is taken out of the house and placed near or under the sacred basil (*tulasi*) plant. Having washed the body, the dying Vaiṣṇava is besmeared with sandal paste and *gaṅgā-mṛttikā* (soil from the bed of the Ganges). In devout Vaiṣṇava families and in satras, the different parts of the body of the dying member are stamped with twelve names of Viṣṇu and auspicious signs like *śaṁkha, cakra, gadā* and *padma* are drawn on it. Sacred rosaries for telling beads are placed around his neck. He is then attired with a new dhoti and over the body a wrapper stamped with sacred names is laid. Holy water of the Ganges or water with which the image of Viṣṇu was washed, is then offered to the dying person for sipping. If the person happens to be a Brahmin, a *śālagrāma* stone symbolising Viṣṇu is placed on his chest, and by offering *madhuparka* to the deity so placed, the *prānotsarga* ceremony (formal dedication of the life) is performed. Finally, when he breathes his last, the dead body is taken to the cremation ground with singing of appropriate devotional songs. The crematory rites are performed according to sastric prescription common to all caste Hindus.

Amusement and Entertainment: Dancing, and both vocal and instrumental music, are cultivated within a satra. Dramatic performance of devotional plays is frequently held on all important occasions. As most of the ancient satras were established on banks of rivers, boat-races were held on festive occasions which served as amusement and diversion to the inmates of the satras. Bedecked with flags and festoons, boats of equal size having equal number of oars were engaged on such occasions and the races were conducted to the accompanyment of songs suitable for the purpose. Songs were so tuned as to synchronize with the rhythmic movement of oars. This boat-race in Barpetā and some satras in Mājuli still attracts big crowd. During the days of Bihu festival, inmates of monastic satras used to amuse themselves by playing *dhop,* a kind of indigenous play where the players divided into two parties throw the *dhop* (a kind of ball made of cloth) to the opposite party which try to catch it in the air without letting the ball drop on the ground. If a party fails to catch, it loses a point. Playing at cowrie on a board similar to the playing of dice was another popular game amongst all sections of people including inmates of the satras.

CHAPTER VIII

CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS

In the preceding chapters we have mainly discussed how the satra institution gradually became the only organisation through which Vaiṣṇavism was propagated and stabilised in the country. The part played by satras in other spheres of Assamese life is also worth noticing. During the last few centuries of its existence it has been enriching the Assamese life morally, socially and educationally and contributed a great deal to the realm of literature and art. But these cultural effects are not altogether independent of religion; rather these may be termed as the products of the same religious movement. Let us first of all discuss the social and moral impact of the satra institution.

Moral and social: It has been shown in the first chapter that Assam is the land where people of various ethnic groups with various shades and grades of culture and heterogeneous beliefs lived side by side. Even those who professed Hinduism were not uniform in their religious and cultural practices. Consequently the foundation of the society was very weak; the cementing bond of unity of beliefs and practices was lacking. They believed in different gods and observed different practices. The Vaiṣṇava movement, of which the satra institution served as the religious organ, supplied a common and simple religion based on ethico-devotional codes and conducts and to a considerable extent did away with the various faiths and creeds of diverse shades and grades. The monotheistic devotional cult prevailed over Polytheism, Animism and Tantricism. Indeed it is no mean achievement of the Vaiṣṇava movement to turn the land of Kāmarūpa, famous from the earliest times as the stronghold of Tāntricism and Śaktism, into a predominantly Vaiṣṇavite land. The fame of Assam as the land of devotional cult reached as far as Rajasthan in the seventeenth century A.D. When Rām Sinha, the Rajput general of Aurangzeb, was engaged in a bloody warfare with the people of Assam, his wife, according to *Assam Burañji,* sent the following written message, warning him of the consequences of such an unholy war against the people of the land: "We have attained enough fame and piety by subjugating princes of many lands. Never think that this fame and piety will be enhanced by subduing the Eastern Kingdom (Assam) and bringing it under the domination of Mughals. We have besides learnt that there is universal *nāma-kīrtana* in that country. By invading it, Oh, how long did Majumkhān (Mirjumla) live ? Consider these facts, and act as you think proper."[1] People living in the easternmost corner of Assam could, now feel, as a result of the spread of Vaiṣṇavism, a sort of comradeship with those living in the westernmost part of Assam. They worship the same deity, observe the same practices, read same scriptures and pay homage to the same set of saints. Thus, the satras supplied some of the principal elements of Assamese nationality and laid the foundation of the Assamese society as well.

The social life of any country could not be altogether detached from religion. This is more true in the case of Indian social life. The ethical basis of the society has always been derived from religion. What is religious is considered necessarily to be moral. Like Vaiṣṇavism of other provinces, Assamese Vaiṣṇavism inherits and blends into its texture much of the recognised ethical and social ideas of larger Indian thought. The universally accepted principles of right living and exalted virtues have been accepted and recognised to be criteria of a virtuous life, while long recognised errors of conduct have been deprecated. The satras acted more or less as the guardians of morality by keeping close vigilance over their disciples. By maintaining regular agents at different localities and by personal visits, the heads of the satras tried to tone up the moral of the people. The heads used to remain for several weeks in localities they visited and not only took cognisance of moral attainment of the disciples but instructed, whenever necessary, on right life and right conduct. The local agents of the satras, generally selected from amongst the ideal type of disciples, were placed always at the disposal of the villagers for their guidance. Moral turpitudes on the part of the village disciples used to be adequately dealt with by the local agents in consultation with the leading villagers.

In maintaining discipline, order and morality of the villagers, the *nāmaghar*, i.e. the village chapels have been playing a prominent part during the last four hundred and odd years. Existence of a *nāmaghar*, big or small, is noticed in every Assamese village. Sometimes it is very difficult to distinguish between two adjacent villages but for the existence of two *nāmaghars*. It is the institution around which all cultural activities of an Assamese village move. This institution is nothing but an extended wing or a miniature replica of the satra institution. The *nāmaghar*, a gift of the satra institution is at once a village prayer hall, a village court and a village theatre : villagers assemble here on various occasions to discuss matters concerning their village. The village elders assemble here to try moral or social delinquency on the part of any villager with the help of *rājmedhi* or *barmedhi*, the local satra agents and mete out punishments according to the nature of offence. Besides cases of moral nature, criminal and civil cases of minor type were tried formerly.

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[1] S. K. Bhuyan (edited) : *Assam Burañji* (from the origin of the Ahoms to 1681 A.D.) p. XXV.

With the introduction and institution of the British system of trial and of dispensing justice, the hold of the village courts at the *nāmaghar* gradually began to dwindle. But in religious and moral matters, decisions taken at the village *nāmaghars* by the elders and under the guidance of the agents of the satras are still carried out. The final appeal in such cases lies with head of the satras of which the parties concerned are disciples. His decision popularly known as *vyavasthā* or *ādeśa* is considered to be binding. Like the ecclesiastical courts of Europe in the middle ages, the satra institution of Assam has been serving as the dispenser of justice, specially in those cases where morality and religion are involved. All contracts made binding by religious oaths generally come under the purview of the satras.[2]

The *nāmaghar* has also been serving as the village public-hall and all collective functions are generally held here. Congregational chantings of prayers on all important occasions, religious recitations and dramatic performances known as *bhāonā* are also held in the *nāmaghar*. Thus, the satra institution with the *nāmaghar* as its offshoot in villages, has been not only responsible to a great extent for keeping up the moral tone of the society but has contributed towards the maintenance of peace, concord and orderliness by providing an adequate forum for the villagers.

Elevation of backward classes: But the most important social contribution of the satra institution is the upliftment of the backward classes and minimization of the rigour of the caste distinction. So-called untouchables and backward classes were freely taken into the religious fold, and the portals to a better mode of living and a higher conduct of life were opened to them. In this respect satras functioned more or less on the line of modern Christian missionaries in India. Though inter-dining and intermarriage between the various classes were not prescribed, yet the spiritual bond and fellow-feeling fostered by satras reduced to a considerable extent invidious distinction between different castes and sub-castes. Members of the so-called untouchable or scheduled castes have been found to live in fellowship with the members of the highest class in Assamese villages and subject to certain limitations they could take part in all the functions of the villages. Responsible functionaries of satras like *barmedhi* or *rājmedhi* are also sometimes selected from amongst the backward classes. In this connection, it would not be irrelevant to point out that the spiritual headship has never been exclusive monopoly of the Brahmins; non-Brahmins, viz., Kāyasthas and Kalitās have been occupying the headship of many of the existing satras.

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[2] *District Gazetteers of Assam* (Sibsagar), p. 95f.

Another notable social contribution of the satra institution is its services to the tribes during its long history of more than four centuries. The religious history of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries is not only marked by vigorous expansion of satras in the plains, but it is also notable for missionary activities of the reformers, who risking everything, penetrated into the tribal areas as well. The earliest attempt to bring the backward tribes into the fold of Vaiṣṇavism was made by Śaṅkaradeva himself who accepted Govinda, a Garo, Jayahari, a Miri, Cāndkhān, a Muslim, as his disciples. In Śaṅkaradeva's translation of the fourth chapter of Book II of the *Bhāgavata-puraṇa* we find a significant stanza wherein the tribes of Assam have been mentioned as getting themselves sanctified by the influence of Vaiṣṇavism.[3] Amongst the early proselytisers, besides Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, the names of Vaṁśīgopāladeva, Aniruddha Bhūyān, Bar-yadumaṇi of Dihing and Śrīrāma of Budhbari satra deserve special reference. Vaṁśigopāladeva was the pioneer proselytiser in eastern Assam, who risking the frown of the contemporary Ahom monarch, preached his faith amongst the erstwhile uninitiated Aryans and non-Aryans of eastern Assam. From amongst the fortyfive *medis* (local proselytisers) appointed by him one Dayāla Bāpu was sent to Maṇipur to preach the new faith.[4] Aniruddha Bhũyān, the founder of the Māyāmarā sect, concentrated his activities mainly in the north-eastern region of Assam, mostly occupied by the Cutiyās, the Morāns and other indigenous non-Aryan tribes. The satras of the Kāla Saṁhati, notably Dihing, Budbāri, Cecā, Bāreghar and Kāṭanipār deserve special appreciation for their proselytising works amongst the backward and tribal people.

The missionary works amongst the backward classes started by the early reformers, were extensively carried out by their successors and followers during the succeeding periods. A short survey of the tribes who were thus brought within the fold of Vaiṣṇavism has been given below.

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[3] *kirāta, kachāri Khāsi gāro miri,*
yavana kaṅka goāl 1
asam-muluk rajaka turuk,
kuvāca mlecca cāṇḍāl 11
āno pāpīnara kṛṣṇa sevakara
saṅgata pavitra hay 1
bhakati labhiyā saṁsāra tariyā
vaikuṇṭhe sukhe calay 11
Bhāgavata, Book II, V. 474.

[4] Govinda Dasa : *Santa-sampradā*, chapt. IV.

Koches: The Koches are the most important people that embraced Hinduism from so many the indigenous tribes. "In Eastern Assam it has been the name of a Hindu sub-caste in which are received the converts to Hinduism from the rank of Kacharis, Lalung, Mikir and other tribes. "In former times the Koches and Mecas (a branch of the Kachāri) freely intermarried, but the conversion of the former to Hinduism has caused the practice to be discontinued."[5] The process of conversion commenced from the time of king Naranārāyaṇa and his son Laksmiārāyaṇa, the Koch kings who developed special liking for Vaiṣṇavism and the latter proclaimed Vaiṣṇavism as the State religion also. As a result, many of their subjects embraced Vaiṣṇavism adopting Hindu manners and customs. Satras augmented the process of conversion in the course of the succeeding centuries.

Kachāri: Amongst the great Kachāri tribes of the Tibeto-Burman stock, there is a branch known as *Śaraṇīyā-Kachāri* i.e. the initiated Kachāris. Though they have been converted to Vaiṣṇavism, they have not altogether given up their tribal customs; only certain broad and easily observable practices of Vaiṣṇavism, such as giving up wine and pork, and chanting of devotional prayers to Viṣṇu etc. are prescribed for them. They have not been absorbed in the Koch caste because of the prevalence of certain tribal customs amongst them. Agents of satras visit them from time to time in order to acquaint themselves with vaiṣṇavite practices. Amongst the Rabhas (a branch of Boḍos) there is a section known as *Paramārthi.* They are largely Vaiṣṇavas and abstain from pork and liquor.[6]

Chutiyā: The Chutiyā tribe of eastern Assam, which once ruled the modern Lakhimpur district, gradually turned towards Vaiṣṇavism, and became disciples of different satras, notably of the Māyāmarā Satra and its branches. The Chutiyās were originally a tribe of the Boḍo race. Their tutelary goddess was known as *Kecāikhātī* (eater of raw flesh) and human sacrifices were also offered to her.[7] But later on they were completely Hinduised by the Gosains and came to be known as Hindu-Chutiyā and some of them were assimilated with the Ahom community who came to be known as Ahom-Chutiyā. "The Hindu and Āhom Chutiyās have very largely adopted Hinduism of the Vaiṣṇava type, and most of them are disciples of the Tiphuk and Māyāmarā gosains."[8]

Miri: Another tribe, popularly known as the Miri (but they call themselves Micim̐) has imbibed a few Vaiṣṇava practices under the influence of Vaiṣṇava Gosains. "The Miris like all other wild tribes are distinguished by the Assamese into *bhakatiyā* and *abhakatiyā* according as they are or are not followers of a Gosain. Their Gosains are chiefly those of Sibsagar district, on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, though the great majority of the Miri settlements are on the north bank or in the island of Majuli, itself the seat of some of the biggest Gosains in Assam."[9]

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[5] E. Gait : *History of Assam*, p. 46f.
[6] S. Endle : *The Kacharis*, p. 86.
[7] " Ibid, p. 93.
[8] " Ibid, p. 91.

Nāgā: Some of the Nāgā tribes of the Tirap Division came under the influence of Vaiṣṇava Gosains of the plains. The Noctes came in contact with the plains more frequently than other tribes. They profess a rudimentary form of Vaiṣṇavism which was propagated amongst them in the eighteenth century by the gosains of the Bāreghar Satra of Nazira.[10]

Ahom: The Ahom, originally a Shan tribe, completely became Hinduised and majority of its members embraced Vaiṣṇavism under the influence of different satriyā-gosains. The Ahoms are at present a sub-caste of Hinduism in Assam. But the most important acquisition to Vaiṣṇavism is the Morāṇ tribe of North-Eastern Assam. These Morāṇs became staunch disciples of the Māyāmarā satra and to avenge the insult offered to their spiritual leader by the Ahom monarch, they, in a body, rebelled against the Ahom power towards the latter part of the eighteenth century, and even succeeded in capturing the throne temporarily.

The members of the above tribes who took to Vaiṣṇavism have gradually adopted Hindu conducts of life. They have also given up many of their unclean habits, discarded animism and have become more and more refined in their dealings. They have mostly discarded their own tongues in favour of Assamese. It should not, however, be supposed that the influence was an one-sided one. Customs, and beliefs of the tribes have influenced or at least coloured Vaiṣṇavism of Assam to a certain extent. The following remarks of Dr. S. K. Chatterjee with regard to Indo-Mongloid participation in Hindu culture may appropriately be quoted in this connection: "It was of a piece with evolution of culture and history in other parts of India: it was largely a case of progressive Indianisation or Hinduisation of the Mongoloid people, bringing them within the fold of what may be called Sanskrit culture. . . . . It was not a case of one-sided influence, or absorption. It was also a case of the Mongoloid speeches, ideologies, cults and customs being engrafted on the stock of the Hindu speech and ideology, cult and customs."[10] That the Vaiṣṇavism of Assam was adopted to suit the different types of people and also received in its fold certain things from the tribes can never be doubted. The practice of taking meat and fish by Vaiṣṇavas including celibate devotees, was allowed probably to accommodate the different tribes who could not be expected to give up meat and fish so easily. The indigenous tribes were given certain laxity in the observance of Vaiṣṇavite practices and conducts. Many articles of artistic quality and utility which we now associate with Vaiṣṇavism were originally received from the tribes, e.g. *bhor-tāl* (*Bhoṭa-tāla*), *dabā* (cattle drums), *śarāi* (trays) etc. The habit of writing satra-chronicles was probably derived from the Ahoms who introduced the system of writing chronicles (Burañjī) in Assam. The influence on satras which worked in the interior places was naturally greater. The case of the Māyāmarā satra is a clear example in this respect. This give and take (when necessary) policy of the satras has brought several tribes noted above to the fold of Assamese nationality, and thus helped in building the structure of Assamese society.

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[9] *The Assam Census Report,* 1901, p. 139.

[10] P. Bhattacharya (edited) : *Asamar Janajāti.*

[10a] S. K. Chatterji : *Kirāta-Jana-Kṛti,* p. 23.

Educational: Next, we consider the educational contribution of the satra institution. In medieval times, up to the British occupation, the education was not a concern of the State. Here and there were *tols* and *pāthśālās* manned by private individuals, but those were like a drop in an ocean. With the development of the satra institution the responsibility of imparting education came under its domain. The satra institution voluntarily took upon itself the noble responsibility of enlightening the people through their own *ṭols*. All the important satras used to maintain and are still maintaining a regular band of scholars whose duty it was to impart education, specially in respect of ancient lores and scriptures. The Vaiṣṇavite lores were, no doubt, studied but other branches of study such as *Vyākaraṇa, Nyāya* and *Kāvyas* were not neglected. Many of the early Vaiṣṇavite reformers took upon themselves the task of educating the pupils. Mādhavadeva himself taught Rāmacaraṇa, his nephew, Haricaraṇa and Puroṣottama, the youngest son and the grandson of Śaṅkaradeva respectively. He also imparted education to Paramānanda, son of Nārāyaṇa Ṭhakur, Achyuta Śarmā, Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā and Lakṣmana Oja.[11] Bhaṭṭadeva, the *satrādhikara* of the Pāṭbausi satra and the father of Assamese prose-literature, conducted a regular *ṭol* in the precincts of his satra and it is narrated in the biography by Rāmrāya Dvija that one thousand students received education from him.[12] Ramānanda Dvija, a biographer of Vaṁśīgopāladeva, states that he received education from Vanamālīdeva, the founder of the Dakṣiṇapāṭ satra. There are many instances to show that Vaiṣṇavite teachers were greatly responsible for diffusing knowledge amongst the mass. We may refer particularly to one instance narrated in the *Kathā-gurucarita,* where we find that an old couple arranged among themselves that the wife would manage the household duties and the husband would daily attend the congregational chanting of prayers held by Gopāla Ātā and his disciples during the day and would recite in the evening the verses learnt during the day to his wife. One evening, the old man could not recite the verses learnt during the day and as a result he was refused food and drink by his wife. The old man then went back to the satra and narrated his experience to the devotees, who thereupon taught the verses again and again till the old man could commit to his memory.[13] Similar instances could be multiplied from the medieval biographies.

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[11] U. C. Lekharu (edited); *Kathā-gurucarita,* p. 618.

[12] Rāmarāya : *Gurulīlā,* p. 207.

Like the Christian monastery of the medieval times, a satra was a religious centre, a school and a library. Not only the existing books were preserved with utmost care, but books were imported from other places of India. Every satra possesses a library consisting of manuscripts to the extent of a few thousand copies. Big satras like Āuniāṭi and Dakṣiṇapaṭ once contained more than a thousand manuscripts, some of which are being preserved in the different antiquarian institutions. It is not that only religous scriptures were preserved, but books on music, dance, medicine, literature, philosophy and even painting were carefully preserved. Some rare Sanskrit manuscripts like the *Śrīhasta-muktāvalī*, *Sātvata-tantra Hasti-vidyārnava* have been recovered from the satra-libraries of Assam.

The books that were preserved were not left to lie fallow. They were industriously and assudiously copied and worn-out ones were replaced by new copies. The manuscript leaves were made of two materials. The thicker variety was made from the bark of *sācī* tree (Aquilaria Agallocha) and the thinner variety known as *tulāpāt* was made by pressing cotton. The preparation entailed a labourious process no doubt, but a set of persons were specially entrusted by affluent satras to do the necessary work of preparing manuscripts. The copying of manuscripts was considered a meritorious deed.

Literary contribution : In the field of literature, the contribution of Vaiṣṇavism and the satra institution is no less considerable. It would not be an exaggeration to say that early Assamese religious literature is practically a product of the Vaiṣṇavite circle. It is true that a certain volume of literature was produced in royal courts of king Naranārāyaṇa of Cooch-Behar and of Rudra Siṁha and Śiva Siṁha of the Ahom royal dynasty, but the output of the courts was not as extensive as that of satras. The task of translating Sanskrit scriptures into Assamese started by Śaṅkaradeva and his collegues continued unabated till the modern times under the inspiration and guidance of the heads of different satras. A detailed survey of the literature produced within the religious atmosphere of the satra institution is given below under different sections.

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[13] U. C. Lekharu (edited) : *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 332.

(1) *Translation and adaptation:* The *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and parts of other Purāṇas were translated into Assamese verses. The *Bhāgavata-purāṇa,* in particular, had been most consistently drawn upon as the treasure-house of stories and incidents, which provided materials for kavyas, dramas and songs. Śaṅkaradeva himself translated more than half of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* of which the *Daśama* (Book X of the *Bhāgavata*) is the most popular. His followers of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries continued the tradition of translating the Sanskrit Purāṇas into popular Assamese verses. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* were translated into metrical Assamese and scores of *Vadha-kavyas* depicting heroism of Pāṇḍavas came to be written on the basis of some incidents of the great epic. Similarly the *Harana-kāvyas* dealing with stories of elopment and abduction written by Vaiṣṇavite poets drawn from some episodes and incidents of the Purāṇas tried to meet the religious and aesthetic demands of the people. Beside Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhava-deva, special mention may be made of Ananta Kandali, Rāma-Śarasvati, Gopāla-caraṇa Dvija, Aniruddha Kāyastha, Bhāgavata Miśra, Keśava Kāyastha, Viṣṇu-Bhārati and Ratnākara Miśra and Govinda Miśra. Gopālacaraṇa Dvija's translation of the *Harivaṁśa* and Viṣṇu-Bharati's translation of the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* also deserve notice. All these writers were either directly or indirectly, connected with satras. Some of them translated Sanskrit works residing within satra precincts and others derived inspiration or received orders (*ājñā*) from religious heads of satras. The entire *Bhāgavata* and the *Gītā* were also translated into Assamese prose by Bhaṭṭadeva, the head of the Paṭbausi satra, in the last decade of the sixteenth century. Episodes of the Viṣṇuite Purāṇas were also developed into independent kavyas by the Vaiṣṇava poets.

Kāvyas based on some stories or incidents of the Purāṇas but developed and elucidated by the poet's own imagination deserve here a special mention. In these kāvyas, the Vaiṣṇavite poets have revealed their originality and poetical genius to the maximum degree. The *Haraṇa-kāvyas* or the poems of abduction have depicted the romance between Kṛṣṇa and Rukminī, Aniruddha and Uṣā and similar stories of love and adventures narrated in the Purāṇas and epics. The devotional stories of Dhruva, Prahlāda, Hariscandra, the adventures of Bhīma and Hanumān and deeds of Kṛṣṇa have been the favourite subjects of the poets. The Assamese life and manners have been woven into the narratives of these kāvyas with skill and naturalness. The *Vadha-kāvyas* numbering more than a score constitute another type of kāvyas. Herein are narrated the adventures and hardship, specially of the Paṇḍavas, in course of their exile, and their deliverance from danger or victory through the grace of Kṛṣṇa. The giants, demons and goblins whom the Paṇḍavas had to encounter in the forest were either vanquished or killed by the help of Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes, these heroic kāvyas are seen to be coloured by love and romance. These stories have illustrated, in concrete forms, the tenets of Vaiṣṇavism. The superiority of Kṛṣṇa over the gods and his love for his devotees, the victory of virtue over vice, the path of devotees attended with trials and tribulations and the ultimate gain of steadfast devotion, have been admirably illustrated through these heroic kāvyas. The actual and the ideal, the real and the fanciful are inextricably woven into these romances. They generate a world of new vision, they give a dynamic spell and charm to the life dedicated to God. Rāma-Śaraswati, the chief translator of the *Mahābhārata* into metrical Assamese was the pioneer writer of this type of kāvyas. Another type of narrative poems written by Vaiṣṇavite poets, is the light humorous kāvyas represented by *Bhīmacarita* and *Kāṇkhowā* (ear-eater). In the former the second Paṇḍava viz., Bhīma, is pictured as an employee of Śiva employed to tend his bull. Śiva is depicted as a cultivator addicted to hemp (*gāñjā*). The latter kāvya may properly be called a lullaby in which Yośdā is shown to have terrified Kṛṣṇa to sleep in the evening by singing of the advent of the demon *Kāṇkhowā* (ear-eater).

The poetry had its own diction. The requirements of alliteration had already brought into being a large vocabulary of synonymous words, many of which are not found in prose. "The writers developed under the influence of their classical training, a style which carry their themes to the conclusion so inevitably that the reader or hearer is almost unaware of the artistry by which that lucidity had been obtained, of the carefully chosen rhythms accentuated by alliteration and other rhetorical devices." Though much of their works are based on Sanskrit originals, yet we do not feel the strain which is usually experienced in a translated work.

(II) *Theological works :* There are several works of theological nature with special reference to the Bhakti cult. The superiority of the Bhakti cult over all other cults, devotion to Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa, types and elements of Bhakti, necessity of Guru and of initiation (*śaraṇa*), merit of holy association and such other topics have been dealt with in all the works of this class. Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti-ratnākara* and *Bhakti-pradīpa* mark the beginning of this type of literature. Mādhavadeva's translation of the *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* by Viṣṇupuri, Bhaṭṭadeva's *Bhakti-viveka* and *Bhakti-sāra*, Rama caraṇa Ṭhākur's *Bhakti-ratna*, Narottama Ṭhākur's *Bhakti-premāvalī* are popular and highly esteemed works. Except Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti-ratnākara* and Bhaṭṭadeva's *Bhakti-viveka* the rest are in Assamese verses. Mādhavadeva's *Nāmaghoṣā* and Gopāla Miśra's *Ghoṣā-ratna* are important works and deal with all aspects of vaiṣṇavism. All these works are of the nature of compilation. Devotional verses collected from the Purāṇas mainly from the *Bhāgavata*, have been classified and rearranged according to the subject-matter into different chapters.

(iv) *Drama :* It has been stated in the second chapter that

Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva each composed six one-act plays in the Brajabuli language. Śaṅkaradeva's dramas are *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa, Pārijāta-haraṇa, Patnī-prasāda, Rāma-vijaya, Rāsa-krīḍā* and *Kāliya-damana* : while those of Mādhavadeva are *Chor-dharā, Pimparā-guchuā, Arjuna-bhanjana, Bhojana-vihāra,* and *Bhūmi-letowā.* There are three more dramas in the name of Mādhavadeva but those are considered to be spurious ones. The language of these dramas, viz. Brajabuli, is an artificial language being an admixture of Maithili and Assamese.

The Vaiṣṇavite poets of medieval Bengal, Orissa and Assam composed their songs and dramas in this artificial language mixing Maithili with their own dialects. The causes of introducing such a foreign element into their own vehicle of expression are not far to seek, specially in the case of drama. The most important cause of making the language of their dramas a bit outlandish, was their desire to produce an illusion of reality in the mind of the audience. The audience must be induced to believe that the dialogues and songs given in the lips of the characters who were invariably the deities of the religious scriptures, were really the words of deities. If, in stead, the language of the everyday life were given, the awe, mystery and reverance which these dramas sought to arouse could not have been evoked. Secondly, the Maithili songs and dramas composed by Vidyāpati and others who preceded Śaṅkaradeva and his contemporaries, were immensely popular with the Vaiṣṇavas of eastern India and therefore, they tried to imitate the language and style of Vidyāpati in their compositions. It became a sort of fashion with the Vaiṣṇava-poets to write in the language and style of Vidyāpati in those days. Thirdly, by using Maithili expressions, the dramas were made to appeal to a larger section of audience. They were not only understood by the Assamese audience but the non-Assamese audience could also follow them.

As regards the technique of 'these dramas, the frame-work was supplied by the Sanskrit drama. The *nāndī-śloka* (benedictory stanza), the *sūtradhāra,* and the concluding verse resembling the *Bharata-vākya* are no doubt borrowed from the Sanskrit drama. The preponderance of song and dance at the cost of dialogue and action is the common feature not only of these Assamese plays but of all other popular plays and performances of medieval India. The *Rāma-līlā* of Northern India, the *Rāsa-dhārī* of Uttara Pradesa and Rajasthana, the *Yātrā* of Bengal, the *Bhavāi* of Gujarat and the dance dramas of the South India, all these medieval plays and performances possess these common characteristics.[14] Another special feature of the *Aṅkiyā-nāṭa* is that the *sūtradhāra* remains as a permanent character from the beginning to the end of the drama. He begins the play by performing the preliminary rites and recitation, introduces the characters to the audience, traces the link between the different incidents, explains to the audience wherever such an explanation is necessary, and finally performs the concluding rites by singing appropriate verses. The action is meagre, while the narrative elements predominate. The characters act and speak at the dictates of the *sūtradhāra* and therefore, the characters in most cases appear conventional.

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[14] Y. K. Yanik : *Indian Theatre* (Allen & Unwin, 1933).

The tone of these dramas is entirely religious and devotion to Kṛṣṇa is the central motive underlying them. The superiority of Viṣṇu-bhakti over all other ways of religious pursuit and the glory of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa have been stressed in all these dramas. The dramas of Śaṅkaradeva have full-fledged stories for their plots, while those of Mādhavadeva are incidental in character. All his dramas deal with incidents of Kṛṣṇa's early life, depicting his childish pranks, obstinacy and shrewdness. In order to evoke the religious sentiment of the audience, the miraculous and the supernatural and at the same time the noble and the sublime qualities of God are depicted. To enliven the dialogue and to make it homely, local touches are also introduced.

Though the dramas are deficient in dramatic qualities, the majority of them are rich in poetry. The various metres, images and vocables employed to depict different situations or ideas are perfectly in tune with the sentiments they express. The songs have their appropriate melodies, each consisting of a refrain (*dhuvā*) followed by a lyrical stanza. The charm of music lends additional attraction to these devotional plays of Vaiṣṇavite poets.[15]

These religious dramas were performed and are still being performed in two places, in the village *nāmaghars* and in satras. In the biographical literature of the Vaiṣṇavas of Assam, references to performances of such plays on all important occasions and religious festivals are found. It became a customary practice with every *satrādhikāra* to perform a drama, composed by himself, to mark his accession to the religious headship. As a result, we find scores of such plays lying in satras of Assam. But later dramas are stereotyped and unimaginative. They are simply imitative productions without much literary value.

(iv) *Biography:* Medieval dramatic and biographical literatures in Assamese are exclusively of the satra origin. The Vaiṣṇavite movement gave birth to a new branch of literature in the form of *caritra-puthis* or biographical books. These *caritras* or *carita-puthis* on the lives and deeds of Vaiṣṇava saints cannot truly be called biographies, they may rather be termed as hagiography. A sense of hero-worship colours the biographer's approach to the lives of the saints, and as a result supernatural and exaggerated accounts are frequently to be met with. Written from a devotional point of view and recording the day to day experiences and incidents of the saints' lives, personally witnessed by the authors or handed down by tradition, the *carita-puthis* may be considered to be the most valuable sources of information of the Vaiṣṇava faith and movement. These biographies further throw light upon the social conditions of Assam during the last four hundred years.

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[15] For a detailed discussion on medieval Assamese plays, K. R. Medhi's article incorporated in *Aspects of Early Assamese literature*, published by the Gauhati University, 1953, may be consulted.

These religious biographies are of two types: the *caritra* type concentrates mainly upon the individual lives of different saints, like Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva, while the other type mainly traces the history of different satras in chronilogical order dealing with lives and activities of successive heads. This type is also known as *satra-vaṁśāvalī.* Almost all the important satras have such chronicles. These biographies and chronicles are found both in verse and prose.

Biographies depicting the lives and activities of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are more than a score in number. Of numerous such works, those written by Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur (17th century), Daityāri Ṭhākur (17th century), Bhūṣana Dvija (17th century), Rāmānanda Dvija (18th century), Aniruddha Dāsa (18th century) are noteworthy. Of the several biographies of Dāmodaradeva, the works written by Rāmrāya Dvija (17th century), Nīlakaṇṭha Dāsa (18th century) are most famous. In the similar way, life of every important Vaiṣṇava saint or religious reformer has been treated in one or more biographical works. There are a few voluminous biographies running up to several hundred pages or folios, where almost all the early Vaiṣṇava reformers' lives and activities have been narrated. The recently published *Kathā-gurucarita* is one of such voluminous works. All these types of religious biographies are not only important from the point of detailed lives and activities of the early Vaiṣṇava reformers but are also valuable for the expositions of the Vaiṣṇavite ideals and tenets. For these reasons, the reading of *carita-puthis* has been a part of religious services conducted on all important occasions in satras.[16]

(v) *Prose:* One of the important contributions of Vaiṣṇavism and of the satra institution is the prose literature. The Assamese prose literature is one of the earliest prose literatures of Northern India. As a literary medium of scholastic ideas and arguments, it has been in vogue since the middle of the sixteenth century. The earliest specimen of prose is found in the prose dialogues and the sūtradhāra's narratives. "The prose style of these dramas has all the good qualities of narrative prose. They can convey to the spectators the speed of events and actuality of objects through concretness, economy, and speed ... ... There is simplicity of the most naked kind . . no figures of speech, no difficulties of idioms and construction. There is nothing to obstruct the easy intelligibility of the passages. The movement of the lines is rapid, and has religious solemnity and dignity both by reason of its subject-matter and that of its rhythm.[17]

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[16] S. N. Sarma's article on medieval biographical literature published in Assamese journal *Surabhi* (vol. III, no. I) has elaborately dealt with the literary, religious and historical importance of these biographies of Vaiṣṇava saints.

But the language of prose dialogues and narratives being in Brajabuli language cannot be properly be called as a specimen of pure Assamese. It is in the hand of Bhaṭṭadeva, the celebrated disciple of Dāmodaradeva, that Assamese prose received a distinct shape. Bhaṭṭadeva translated the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa,* the *Gītā,* and the *Bhakti-ratnāvalī,* the three important sources of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism into Assamese prose. He did not exactly employ the actually spoken language of the people ; it is similar to the literary language employed in the verse translations, being laden with Sanskrit vocabulary and artificial forms. But his style has a certain rhythm and dignity which the actually spoken dialect could not have provided.

The dignified religious prose which Bhaṭṭadeva evolved and which came to be known as *kathā,* served as a model of religious prose to subsequent Vaiṣṇavite writers. Raghunatha Mahanta's *Kathā-Ramāyaṇa,* Bhagavata Bhaṭṭāchāryya's *Kathā-sūtra* (a gist of the Bhāgavata in prose) and *Kathā-ghoṣā* by Parasurama and a few other works are modelled on the prose of Bhaṭṭadeva.

Akin to religious prose of Bhaṭṭaveda in dignity of style but more natural in diction and less artificial in the use of syntax and vocabulary, is the prose employed in the biographies of Vaiṣṇavite saints and monastic heads. This prose strikes a balance between the artifiicial prose of Bhaṭṭadeva and realistic prose style of the chronicles (*Burañjīs*) written in the courtly atmosphere. *Kathā-gurucarita, Bardowa-kathācarita, santa-sampradā* and *Sat-sampradāya-kathā* are some of the notable biographical works written in prose. The majority of prose biographies were written in the eighteenth century and afterwards.

(vi) *Songs :* Devotional songs and lyrics produced by the religious heads from the age of Śaṅkaradeva to comparatively recent times are enormous in extent. It is not that before Śaṅkaradeva there were no literary songs in Assam. We come across poets like Durgābara, Pītāmbara, Mankar of the pre-Vaiṣṇavite period, who composed songs attuned to classical *rāgas.* But those songs of pre-Vaiṣṇavite period lack that intense devotional fervour and lofty ideals which mark the devotional songs of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and other Vaiṣṇava poets. These devotional songs of lofty sentiments and poetic beauty composed by Śaṅkaradeva and

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[17] J. K. Misra : *A History of Maithili Literature,* p. 398f.

Mādhavadeva are called *Bargītas,* i.e. noble or higher songs, to differentiate from later imitative devotional songs. At present 240 songs composed by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are generally accepted as *Bargīta.* The language of these songs is mostly Brajabuli, a *Mischsprache* of North Indian Vaiṣṇava poets. With all their lofty ideas, literary beauty and heart-rending music, the *Bargītas* not only became the solace of spiritually distressed hearts, but they also came to be a potent factor in attracting people towards Vaiṣṇavism. These noble songs generally depict six sentiments (*rasa*), viz. (i) *līlā,* i.e. divine sports of the Lord, mainly of Kṛṣṇa, (ii) *paramārtha* (knowledge of the Supreme Being), (iii) *viraha* (pangs of separation), (iv) *virakti* (apathy or indifference to worldly objects, (v) *caura* (incidence of stealing milk or milk-products by Kṛṣṇa in his early life), (vi) *cāturi* (childish pranks and cleverness of Gopāla).

With the growth and spread of the satra system, the popularity of the *Bargīta* increased by leaps and bounds and became a regular practice with satras to begin the daily and occasional devotional services with a *Bargīta.*

In the post-Śaṅkaradeva period, the popularity and esteem enjoyed by *Bargīta,* inspired many others, mainly the heads of satras, to write songs in the line of *Bargīta,* and it continued to be written till the beginning of the nineteenth century. The heads of different satras affiliated to the Kāla Saṁhati have contributed most to this branch of old Assamese literature, Gopāla Ātā, founder of the Kāla Saṁhati composed a number of songs. Amongst his twelve principal disciples, Śrīrāma Sarmā composed eighty-one songs, Bar-Yadumaṇi wrote one hundred and fortytwo, Aniruddha Bhũyān of the Māyāmarā satra composed hundred and eightytwo songs. Successive heads of the Dihing satra composed several scores of songs, and heads of other Kāla Saṁhati satras have also left a considerable number of songs. The contribution of the Puruṣa Saṁhati is also not negligible. There are nearly twenty songs to the credit of Puruṣottama Ṭhākur. Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur, and Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākur have also left a few songs. In these songs of the post-Śaṅkaradeva period Brajabuli language is not uniformly used as the medium of expression. But the intensity of devotional urge and elegance of composition are not always noticed in the later compositions. Besides these songs, there are songs incorporated in devotional plays, known as *Aṅkargīta* (songs of dramas) but usually they have no independent use outside the sphere of dramatic performance.

Music: The cultivation of the musical art in medieval Assam was assiduously carried on in satras. Devotional songs mentioned in foregoing paragraphs, set to tunes of various classical *rāgas,* are sung with scrupulous care. Deviation from original tune is never allowed. Almost all the *rāgas* employed in the songs are found in Sanskrit musical treatises.

Rāgas employed in devotional songs and plays and traditionally current in the satras are—(1) Ahīra, (2) Aśowāri, (3) Bhupālī, (4) Barārī,

(5) Belowārā, (6) Bhāṭiyālī, (7) Dhānaśī, (8) Gāndhāra, (9) Gaurī, (10) Kāmoda, (11) Kalyāṇa, (12) Kānāḍa (13) Kedāra, (14) Kau, (15) Lalita, (16) Māhura, (17) Mallāra, (18) Nāṭa, (19) Nāṭa-mallāra, (20) Sindhurā, (21) Suhāi, (22) Śrī, (23) Śāraṅga, (24) Śyām, (25) Tur-vasanta, (26) Vasanta. It is a customary practice to describe the origin and nature of a *rāga* before a song in a particular *rāga* is actually sung. This type of composition showing the mythological origin of *rāgas* is popularly known as *rāga-mālitā*. In *rāga-mālitā* the origin of every *rāga* has been linked up with some exploits of Kṛṣṇa or Rāma.

Tāla (time-beat) is generally maintained by instrumental play of drums (*khola*) and cymbals. *Tālas* employed in singing the above *rāgas* are—(1) Yati, (2) Bar-yati, (3) Mān-yati, (4) Ektāla, (5) Paritāla, (6) Kharmān, (7) Rūpaka, (8) Domāni, (9) Saru-yati. The above mentioned *tālas* are of common use. Besides these, there are a few more varieties of *tāla* prevalent in different satras. R. M. Nath states that there are nineteen varieties of *tāla* prevalent in satras of Assam.[18]

As the art of music was cultivated with religious zeal and reverence, it had little chance of being debased by novices. It is the satra institution that helped in keeping its purity in tact as far as possible. Satras of all dimensions maintain a regular band of vocal musicians headed by an adept, known as *gāyana* and a party of instrumental players headed by a *bāyana*. These two parties generally combine together in musical performances.

Musical instruments generally associated with the satra institution can be classified into four types:

(i) *Tata-yantra,* i.e. string instruments, is mainly *ṭokārī*. (ii) *Ghana-yantras* are mainly *tāla* (cymbals), *bhor-tāla* (cymbals of large size, probably taken from the Bhutanese), *khuti-tāla* (miniature cymbals), *kara-tāla* (made of a split bamboo and the sound is produced by rubbing a cowri across the notches of a stripped bamboo), *rāma-tāla* (a kind of musical clapper made of two pieces of split bamboo and the sound is produced by clapping one against the other), *ghantā* (bell), and *kāh* (gong). (iii) *Anaddha-yantras* covered with skins are *dabā* (kettle drum), *nāgarā, mṛdaṅga, khol* and *dhol*. (iv) *Susira* or wind instruments used, are *śaṅkha* (conch) and *kāli* (long pipes).

Besides the above mentioned instruments, there are many other instruments, but as they are not generally used for religious purposes they are rarely used in satras. The leaders of the orchestral party, i.e. the *gāyana* and the *bāyana* used to coach young men having musical aptitude, residing within the satra compound, in traditional methods and modes of playing on instruments and the varied ways of singing religious songs. These methods and modes of playing on instruments and singing religious songs in satras have extended their sway over villages also. Every Assamese village of some standing possessed an orchestral party (*gāyana-bāyana*) consisting of members of the village specially trained up for the purpose. The village *nāmaghar* served as the centre of training. Of late, however, it is in the process of gradual liquidation, but still it cannot be denied that whatever musical accomplishment of the classical order Assamese villagers did posses or still possessing, it is because of the influence of satras.

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[18] R. M. Nath : *Kāliyadamana-nāṭa*, p. 85ff. Recently, a small treatise on *Tāla* (time-beat) with reference to playing in *Khol* (a type of drum) has been recovered from Mitradeva Mahanta of the Letugrām Satra. An article on the above work was published in the Journal of the Music Academy, Madras, vol. XXII. The article was written by Dr M. Neog, Gauhati.

Dance and theatre: Closely connected with music are dance and theatrical performance. Dance is associated with religion from the remote past. From the temple ruins of Deo-Parbat as well as from the architectural ruins of Tezpur, dancing figures have been recovered. In the inscription of Vanamāla (9th century) reference has been made to the existence of female dancers in the temples.[19] In the temples of Hayagrīva-Mādhava at Hajo and the Śaiva temples at Dobi, Viswanāth and Negheriting dancing by female dancers (*naṭī*) formed a part of daily religious programme. The custom of temple-dancing had been prevalent from several centuries back as known from the above inscriptional references and had been in vogue till the last decade of the nineteenth century A.D. The type of dance prevalent in the temple of Mādhava at Hajo probably influenced the satriyā type of dance also, for, there is still a type of dance prevalent in the Āuniāti satra which is known as *Hājow̱alīyā nāc*, i.e. the dance of Hajo.

Satras have developed a school of classical dance in Assam. It is entirely religious in motive. It is popularly known as *satrīyā-nāc*, and has received high appreciation from eminent dance connoisseurs of India. The satra-dance, like all other Indian classical dances, is performed by rhythmic movement of body and feet accompanied with poses and gestures of hands, suggesting various ideas and sentiments. Gestures and poses employed in a satra-dance have certain affinities with those of Indian dance-scriptures. The tradition of this type of dance is very old and goes back to the pre-Śaṅkaradeva period. The *ojā-pāli* dance performed generally on the occasions of the worship of the snake goddess Manasā has been in vogue from the pre-Śaṅkarite period and as noted by Daityāri Ṭhākur, Śaṅkaradeva himself arranged *ojā-pāli* party occasionally for chanting devotional prayers. Now, the *ojā,* i.e., the leader of the *ojā-pāli* party must be an expert dancer and musician well-versed in the use of various gestures (*mudrā*) and rhythmic movements and poses. There is a popular floating verse in Assam on the qualification of an *ojā,* according to which, "The best *ojā* is he, who while singing keeps time by his feet, suggests ideas by hand-gestures and can rapidly move like Garuḍa".[20] A manuscript of the *Śrīhasta-muktāvalī,* by Subhankara with an Assamese translation by Sucāndarāi Ojā has been discovered a few years back in the manuscript library of the Āuniāṭi satra. The discovery of an Assamese translation of the *Śrīhasta-muktāvalī* at least points to the existence of a tradition of the classical dance on the line of dance described by Bharata, Nandīkeśvara and others. But it would not be true to say that Assamese classical dances prevalent in satras are in strict conformity with the methods and modes of dances prescribed in Sanskrit treatises on dramaturgy and dance. Assam has evolved a new type of classical dance on the basis of the ancient Indian tradition.

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[19] Tezpur Grant of Vanamāla, v. 24; B. K. Barua : *A Cultural History of Assam*, pp. 120, 173f.

Of the several types of classical dances prevalent in satras, *sūtradhāra-nṛtya, natuwā-nāc, rāsa-nṛtya, cāli-nāc* and *kṛṣṇa-nāc* may be specially mentioned. *Sūtradhāra-nṛtya* is a part of the religious dramatic performance known as *bhāonā* in Assamese. The *sūtradhāra* by performing the preliminary dance in which he salutes God and invokes His blessings, sets to motion the dramatic performance. The *sūtradhāra-nṛtya* consists of three parts. In the initial part of the dance he salutes the Lord and invokes His blessings through his dance. This part of the dance is known as *sarubhaṅgi* i.e. the lesser rhythm. In the second stage he gives expression to the sentiment and content of the *nāndī-śloka* recited by him. In the third stage he recites the devotional prayer in Assamese and expresses through his successive dance-movements the sentiments expressed in different verses of the prayer. The latter stages of the dance is called *barbhaṅgi* i.e., the higher rhythm. In this dance the rapid and supple movements of the body and feet are employed more than the hand poses. The tempo of the dance gradually heightens.[21]

Naṭuwā-nāc (*naṭuwa* <Sk. *naṭa*) is a class of dance, generally performed by nautch-boys putting on a special costume. This class of dance has several varieties and usually depicts some devotional sentiments. *Rāsa-nṛtya* is a *lāsya* type of dance and teen-aged boys donning female costume appear as gopis with Kṛṣṇa in their midst. *Kṛṣṇa-nāc* includes a few varieties of dance and depicts the adventures of Kṛṣṇa.

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[20] The verse runs thus :

Mukhe gīt hāte mudrā pāwe dhare tāl 1
Garuḍa sadṛśa ghūre sehi ojā bhāl ll

[21] K. R. Medhi : *Aṅkāwali,* p. LI ; R. M. Nath : *Kāliyadamana-nāṭa,* p. 77f.

The term *cāli-nāc* is used to mean two types of dances. The heroic type of dance performed by actors while entering the stage is called *cāli-nāc*. It is also used to mean a *lāsya* type of dance performed by nautch-girls (males with female costume) representing gopis. In Śārngadeva's *Saṅgīta-ratnākara* references to two types of dance, *cāri* and *cāli* are found. The latter i.e., *cāli* has been styled as *deśaja-lāsya*.[22]

The dramatic performance known as *bhāonā* (Śk. *bhāva*=sentiment) introduced for the first time by Śaṅkaradeva became increasingly popular with the progress of times. One-act plays written by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva and other Vaiṣṇava poets are enacted through the medium of this *bhāonā* performance. The centres of dramatic composition and performance have been the satras. The *bhāonā* performance at the beginning not only served as the medium of religious propaganda but also came to be a source of pleasure and recreation. Of late, however, the *bhāonā* performance has ceased to function as the medium of religious propaganda but its utility in giving aesthetic pleasure to villagers has not decreased.

Assamese *bhāonā* performance begins with a sort of *purvaraṅga* which is called *dhemāli* in Assamese. *Dhemāli* consists of the singing of orchestral music of devotional type to the accompaniment of the playing of instruments. The players move forward and backward and sometimes whirl round the hall according to the tempo of the beating or *mṛdanga* or *khol*. Then the *sūtradhāra* introduces the drama after his preliminary dance is over. He recites *nāndī* and introduces the characters. The *sūtradhāra* not only recites *ślokas* and *bhaṭimās* (Assamese devotional songs) but also controls and directs the performance from the beginning to the end, supplying and explaining the links of the plot.

The preponderance of songs and dance is a marked feature of the *bhāonā* performance. Even the actors enter and move on the stage with rhythmic gait. The decorations and accessories employed in the *bhāonā* also deserve consideration in this connection. Masks form the principal accessory; actors playing the part of Gods, Asuras, Rākṣasas, monkeys, birds, reptiles etc. wear masks of various types. Thus, for instance, masks containing ten and four heads are worn by players representing Rāvana and Brahmā respectively. Similarly, masks resembling a monkeys or a bird is worn by the players representing Hanumat and Garuḍa. Model works include chariots, thrones, trees, animals, bows, arrows etc. Bodily decorations include false hair, false beards and whiskers, various ornaments and face paintings. The faces of actors are painted Kṛṣṇa, Rāmacandra, Nārāyaṇa and some other characters are painted with blue colour; sages, Brahmins etc. are painted with the white, while Asuras, Dānavas and some

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[22] Śarṅgadeva : *Saṅgīta-ratnākara,* VII/904-1215.

Devas are painted with the red and Rakṛasas with black colour. Costumes of various designs for different grade of characters are specially prepared.[23]

The earliest reference to the performance of *bhāonā* is found in the *Śaṅkara-carita* by Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhakur. He, being a junior contemporary of Mādhavadeva, vividly describes the first performance, *Cihna-yātrā*, wherein were depicted the scenes of seven Vaikuṇṭhas with a presiding Viṣṇu over each.[24] It was staged on a painted background. Śaṅkaradeva trained dancers (*naṭuwa*) singers and musicians (*gāyana-bāyana*), prepared masks (*mukhās*) and accessories (*cho*) and made necessary arrangement for the entry and exit of characters. He gave the performance on a certain night by making provision for light. After the preliminary orchestral music consisting of several stages viz., *nāṭ-dhemāli, chota-dhemāli, bar-dhemāli* and *devadhemāli,* was over, Śaṅkaradeva himself entered the stage as the *sūtradhāra*. Then, seven actors (Śaṅkaradeva was one of them) representing seven Viṣṇus entered the stage followed by six Lakṣmīs. Six boys dressed as maidens performed the rôle of Lakṣmīs.[25] There was no Lakṣmī in the seventh heaven where Śaṅkaradeva himself in the rôle of Viṣṇu appeared. Sarvajaya, performed the rôle of Garuḍa putting on a mask resembling the head of a bird. Similar accounts of dramatic performances are found in other biographies also. Mādhavadeva, on one occasion, performed *Rāma-yātrā* where Ṭhākur Ātā, Paramānanda, Rāmacaraṇa, and Balāi and Gopala Ātā represented Daśaratha, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, and Śatrughna respectively; Harivallabha appeared in the rôle of Sītā. On another occasion Mādhavadeva, at the request of his favourite disciple Viṣṇu, staged a drama *Nṛsiṁha-yātrā* at the latter's locality.[26] The performance was so successful and interesting that when the audience saw Nṛsiṁha earing open the entrails of Hiraṇyakaśipu, they fled in confusion believing the incident to be a real one. Instances can be multiplied.

Bhāonā performance specially flourished in satras where it became a regular feature on all ceremonial occasions. With the increases of its popularity it gradually spread to villages also. Even in royal courts it began to receive more and more appreciation. *Bhāonā* performances were held on distinguished occasions. *Rāvanavadha-bhāonā* was performed on the occasion of the visit of the Rajas of Cachar and Manipur to the Ahom court; *Padmāvatī-haraṇa* was performed in the presence Gaurinatha Siṁha by sons of Na-Gosain and the *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* was staged in the presence

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[23] K. R. Medhi : *Aṅkāwali*, p. LV-LVII.

[24] Rāmcaraṇa Ṭhākur : *Śaṅkara-carita*, p. 114ff.

[25] : Ibid, V. 1415.

[26] U. C. Lekharu : *Kathā-gurucarita*, pp. 247, 409.

Kamaleśwara Siṁha under the direction of the Mahanta of Bāreghar satra.[27]

Crafts: The growth and popularity of *bhāonā* performance gave birth to a class of artisans who specialised in the art of preparing costume, decorations and accessories of the performance. The making of masks and costumes necessary for the bhāonā performance required specialised professional skill and in course of time it became a sort of hereditary art confined to a few families at different localities. But in satras where celibate devotees in large numbers permanently reside, these crafts of making and preparing decorative materials and accessories of dramatic performance were cultivated by a section of celibate inmates of satras.[28]

Besides the crafts connected with *bhāonā,* there were a few more crafts which found suitable atmosphere for their growth and development in satras. Some of these crafts are still lingering in a few satras. Thus, the art of carving miniature images of deities, thrones and seats (*āsana*) of ivory, beautifully decorated and painted with various designs, are still in existence, in a few satras at Barpeṭā and Mājuli. Finely carved and chislled wooden images of gods, goddesses and incarnations adorn the shrines of many a satra. Images of Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa, Vāsudeva and ten principal incarnations of Viṣṇu, no doubt, form the bulk of these wooden carvings. The class of people professionally devoted to this type of works is known as *khaṇikar*. References to carving and installing of wooden images of Viṣṇu in some satras are found in medieval biographies of saints and proselytisers. The earliest reference is found in the biographies of Śaṅkaradeva who in order to induce the Brahminical section to embrace his faith, caused one Karalā Bārhai to carve out a wooden Viṣṇu image and installed that with appropriate ceremony.[29] A similar instance of carving and installing another Viṣṇu image (*Keśavaraya*) in the Kowāmarā satra is found in the biography of Anantarāya Ātā, the founder of the above satra.[30] The wooden and ivory images serve two-fold purpose. Ceremoniously installed images are generally worshipped as deities and others are kept fitted to walls or panels of the shrine (*maṇikūṭa*) and prayer halls (*nāmaghar*) for decorative purposes Figures of gods and incarnations seated on their usual *vāhanas* are frequently seen carved on the door panels and beams of satra structures.

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[27] S. K. Bhuyan (edited) : *Tuṅgkhuṅgiā Burañjī*, pp. 51, 92, 177.

[28] Monks of St. Benedictine Monastic Order utilised their spare hours in the field of literary works, but their primary and essential work was what Benedictine called 'the work of God'.

Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. I, p. 537f.

[29] Daityāri Ṭhākur : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadevar carita*, pp. 85, 89.

[30] Bhadracāru Dās : *Anantarāya-carita* (Ms.) V. 325.

Images, fashioned out of stones and metals, adorn thrones of a number of satras. These were mostly imported from outside. The biography of Vaṁśīgopāladeva and Vanamālīdeva have described in details how images were imported from outside the state and installed them with due ceremony in their own satras. A few of the icons installed in satras were originally discovered while digging plinth or excavating tanks, but the majority of images were imported from other provinces. That such images of gold, silver, copper and stone installed in satras were considerable in number during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is known from the chroniclers' account of the period. The *Tuṇgkhungīā Burañjī* records that king Gadādhara Siṁha (1681-1696) and Queen Phuleśwarī (1724-1732) replenished the royal treasury by melting images of various metals forcefully taken from satras.[31] The *Ananta-carita* by Bhadracāru Dasa, narrates the vandalism of Gadādhara Siṁha in the following way : "Some images were of wood and others were of various metals and stones beautifully carved. The wooden and stone images were cast into rivers, while those of metals were melted out."[32] Besides the images of deities, wooden standing figures of *dvārapālas* (gatekeepers) and kneeling figures with folded hands like Garuḍa, Hanumat, Jaya and Vijaya are noticed in the entrance of the shrines and prayer halls of satras.

Wooden and copper thrones (*siṁhāsana*) consisting of one to seven tiers supported by four to thirty-two lions and painted and decorated with various designs, adorn the shrines of satras. On these thrones, images of the deity or copies of sacred scriptures are kept. In a manner less gorgeous but artistically made are the *karaṇis* (Sk. *karaṇḍikā*) where necessary materials for daily worship are kept. Another noteworthy artistic thing most commonly used in satras as well as in the household of nobles and kings on all ceremonial occasions is *śarāi* (Sk.=*sarāva*) of various sizes and types. The *śarāi* is a kind of tray having an artistically carved stand and made of both wood and copper. To offer anything in a *śarāi*, whether to deities or to guests, is considered to be an expression of the highest honour and reverence in Assamese life. The craft of making artistic fans with finely split canes decorated and painted with *heṅgul* (vermilion) and *harital* (yellow arsenic) is exclusively confined to satras. The celibate *bhaktas* in their off-time engage themselves in such crafts which attract ready customers also.

Painting: Painted ceilings and walls of *nāmaghar* and *maṇikūṭa* of some satras give ample proofs of artistic faculty of Assamese artisans. Medieval biography of religious saints and the satra chronicles contain descriptions of a few *nāmaghars* having painted ceilings and walls where the stories from epics were portrayed and painted with various decorations and designs. The walls of the *nāmghar* of the Barpeta satra, constructed under the supervision of Mādhavadeva were covered with thin sheets of tin (*raṅ*) and mica (*bālicandā*). Beautiful creepers with floral designs were carved on the panels of front doors and the gate.[33] The chronicle of the Māyāmarā satra gives a vivid description of painting and decoration drawn on the walls of the *satra-nāmaghar* at Khutiāpoṭā. Various incarnations of Viṣṇu, principal gods (*devas*), great mythological kings like Māndhatṛ, Dhruva, Sāgara etc. and their deeds, venerable sages, Gandharvas and Kinnaras were painted on the walls. On the beams and posts of the structure, animals and bird of all descriptions were portrayed.[34] Similar descriptions of wall-painting and decoration are also found in some other biographies and chronicles of medieval times. The specimens of paintings on the walls of *nāmaghar* and *maṇikūṭa* of satras are still to be found in those satras where the ancient types of structure are extant.

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[31] S. K. Bhuyan : *Tuṅgkhungīā Burañjī*, pp. 26f, 38.

[32] *kato dārumaya katosava pātharar*
kato dhātumaya mūrti parama-sundar
dhātumaya sakalak bhāṅgiyā nileka
dārumaya pātharak jale pelāileka
Anantarāya-carita, V. 606.

The art of book-illustration by means of miniatures was largely cultivated in the seventeeth and eighteenth centuries of the Christian era. All the illustrated manuscripts have not yet been published, and therefore, no serious attempt has been made to study the technique of Assamese religious paintings of the medieval period. Recently, an illustrated copy of the Book X (*Daśama-skandha*) of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, dated 1461 (Śaka) recovered from Bāli satra of Nowgong, has been published. The remark of Dr. S. K. Bhuyan with regard to the illustrated manuscripts of Assam deserves to be quoted here : "The skill of a painter was generally requisioned to decorate the labour of penmanship. The scribe was sometimes a painter himself, and if not a regular painter, supplemented the work of the transcriber by sketching appropriate pictures on spaces left blank for the purpose. The epics were generally illustrated, specially those prepared for princes and principal Gosains (*satrādhikāra*). The pictures are available in all combinations of colours, prominent of these being yellow, green and red."[36] Monochromic picture is singularly absent from the medieval Assamese paintings.

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[33] *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 356.

[34] Cidānanda Goswami : *Aniruddhadevar carita*, p. 35ff.

[35] The published *Citra Bhāgavata* does not contain the date referred to by the publisher H. N. Datta Barua. Perhaps the date referred to by the publisher forms a part of the metrical composition of the original manuscript. In that case the date referred to, may indicate the time of composition of the metrical portion by Śaṅkaradeva.

[36] S. K. Bhuyan (edited) : *A Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts* by H. C. Goswami, p. XVIII.

Illustrations are of two varieties, viz., (i) decorative (ii) thematic. In the former type borders of each folio are painted with various floral and decorative designs. In the latter type, the story described in the manuscript is illustrated with vivid details. This type of illuminated manuscripts, so far recovered, are (i) *Saṁkhacūḍa-vadha,* (1926) *Dharma-purāṇa* (1735 A.D.) (iii) *Hastīvidyārṇava* (iv) *Ānanda-lahari,* (v) *Gītagovinda,* (vi) *Lava-Kuśar Yuddha,* (vii) *Kalki-purāṇa,* (viii) *Daśma-skandha* (*Bhāgavata*), (ix) *Laṅkā-kāṇḍa* and *Sundarākāṇḍa* (*Rāmāyaṇa*) and (x) *Darrang-Rājvaṁśāvali.* A few more illuminated manuscripts are definitely known to be in existence in different satras of Assam. Excepting the *Daśama-skandha,* the others have not yet been completely published.

The fine art of manuscript-painting was cultivated in the royal court of Rudra Siṁha (1696-1714) and Śiva Siṁha (1714-1744) as well as in satras. There are reasons to believe that there was a close liaison between the court and satras with regard to the cultivation of this branch of the fine art. Almost all the illustrated manuscripts definitely known to be the products of the court painters such as *Ānanda-lahari, Hastīvidyārṇava* and *Gīta-govinda* have been recovered from the satra libraries. Moreover, the manuscripts which do not bear any reference to the courtly influence or inspiration and for which we can take them to be products of satra painters, bear close resemblance to court-illustrations. The only difference being that the court illustrations in some cases as those of *Saṁkhacūḍa-vadha* and *Hastīvidyārṇava* appear to be sophiscated and more competent.

All the manuscript illustrations are conventional in style and technique and almost all of them are religious in motif. What has been said by Dr N. C. Mehta with regard to Gujarāti painting is equally applicable to Assamese miniature painting: "The artist is more concerned with his narratives than with the exhibition of his accomplishment. Mere technical skill is held in reserve in subordination to the narrative flow of pictures."[37] In these illustrations the use of turban or *muglāi pāg* (head-dress worn by Muslim nobles and princes), long flowing garment (*aṅgaraksā*) like those worn by Muslim nobles of medieval times, *ornās* wrapped round the upper part of body and covering the head as well and skirts or *śārī* (lower garment like petticoat) worn by female figures as those of the Rajasthani painting, is frequently seen. Men are usually depicted as wearing three pieces of cloth, viz., *dhoti,* waist-band (*kamarbandh*) scarf (*dopāttā*) and women are also seen to put on three pieces of cloth, viz., *ghāgrā* or *śārī,* waist-band and a gaily coloured scarf or *chaddar* with both ends hanging loosely over the two sides of the body. The use of bodice (*coli*) by female figures is confined to noble-class ladies.

Facial features are unifomly drawn in profile. The long almondshaped eye of the Indian canon of beauty has been stressed. The human figures, both male and female, are depicted showing thin waist and broad chest. The facial appearances, conventionally or flatly drawn, appear all alive. Rākṣasas have been painted in black with monstrous appearance, while Asuras or Danavas are generally shown either in black or in red colour wearing *muglāi pāg,* long flowing garment (*chāpkan*) and pyjamas and containing beard like those of Muslims. Devas, with certain exception, are painted red or yellow; Mahādeva, Balabhadra, Brahmā and Brāhmaṇas have been painted in white and Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa black or green colour.

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[37] N. C. Mehta : Indian Painting.

The birds and animals are realistically portrayed. Trees of different kinds are conventionally but charmingly painted. Birds of different colour and species have been depicted in both static and moving position. Trees are usually painted having each leaf clearly differentiated. Elevation or depression of sites is clearly indicated by subtle use of line and colour. Commenting on the medieval landscape painting as seen in manuscripts of Assam, Dr S. K. Chatterjee remarks : "One thing marks off the eighteenth century paintings of Assam—there are beautiful landscape, mostly green and undulating plains with flowers, trees, and hills and rivers. It is a wonder how the beauty of nature as spread out over the face of the earth could captivate these artists of Assam in a way it never did artists in other parts of India."[38] Water is generally indicated by broad wavy parallel lines of green colour interspersed with thin white lines. Houses have been indicated by showing the frames of facades and gables. But in the court-paintings, notably in *Dharma-purāṇ* and *Saṁkhacūḍa-vadha* ponds and lakes with lilies and lotuses are more realistically portrayed. Palaces containing superstructures and dome-shaped temples with spacious *mandapas* have been ably painted by the courtpainters. These architectural drawings by the court-painters showing houses, palaces and temples resemble those of the Rajput painting. Lying or sleeping position is indicated by drawing the figures horizontally.

Things of the Assamese life are not altogether absent. Drums (*khol*), cymbals (*tāl*), Assamese trays (*śarāi*) horn-pipe (*pepā*), Bihu-drums (*dhol*), sitting stools (*tāmuli-pirā*) and bed-steads (*chāl-pirā*) and country-made sun-shades (*jāpi*) have been depicted in many a scene.

The sole aim of the Assamese miniature painting is to tell the story swiftly and vividly through the medium of line and colour. Perspective in the usual sense is absent and subtle use of light and shade and complexities of colour are also lacking. The remark made in respect of the paintings of the *Citra-Bhāgavata* is broadly applicable to most of the illuminated manuscripts in Assam. "There is a striking similarity in form between the paintings of the *Citra-Bhāgavata* and those of Gujarata between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries of the Christian era. The paintings of the *Citra-Bhāgavata* are marked by angular convention and linear composition. The tone of colour is flat and perspective is conspicuous by its absence."[39] The miniatures of the *Śaṁkhacūḍa-vadha*, however, are sophisticated and more competent and predominantly influenced by Mughal-Rajput style.

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[38] S. K. Chatterjee : *Place of Assam in the History and civilisation of India,* p. 38.

That Assamese painting, whether cultivated in the court or in satras, is basically of the same category and technique, cannot be doubted ; they only differ in degrees of perfection. Assamese miniatures, according to Dr S. K. Chatterjee shows a happy blending of eastern Indian style of religious miniatures with more sophisticated Mughal and Rajasthani paintings and possibly also of Kangra art.[40] The date 1539 A.D. assigned to the published illuminated *Bhāgavata* is doubtful, because most of the paintings of the same style are definitely known to be products of the eighteenth century and after. But it cannot also be denied that tradition of medieval painting in Assam could be traced back to Śaṅkaradeva (1449—1568) and his times. It is uniformly stated in all the biographies of Śaṅkaradeva that he introduced for the first time the painted scenes as back-ground of a dramatic performance known as *Cihna-yātrā.* Possibly this attempt of Śaṅkaradeva marked the beginning of the religious painting in medieval Assam. It is further told in biographies that a sanyāsī taught him the art of painting. The art of painting received further impetus and took a definite shape during the reign of king Rudra Siṁha (1696—1714) and Śiva Siṁha (1714—1744) whose portraits are appended to a few illustrated manuscripts so far recovered. Probably they also imported painters from northern India to do the work of painting. The names of Dilbar and Dosāi, the two Mahmadan painters of the *Hastīvidyārṇava* help us to form such an opinion. But whatever might be the origin of the medieval manuscript-painting in Assam, the art as cultivated and developed in Assam and distinctly showing an Assamese bias cannot but be called Assamese painting. The satra institution has also played a considerable part in its growth, preservation and popularity.

In short, the cultural history of Assam in respect of fine arts and crafts, of education and learning, and of literature and fine arts since the beginning of the sixteenth century till the advent of the British developed centering round the Vaiṣṇava movement which in turn found expressions through the satra institution.

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[39] Article on *Citra-Bhāgavata* by R. Majumdar in *Paricaya,* vol. XIII, part I, Issue No. 3, 1953.

[40] S. K. Chatterjee : *Place of Assam in the History and civilisation of India,* p. 58.

CHAPTER IX

RELATION OF THE SATRA WITH THE STATE

In this chapter an attempt has been made to trace the history of the relation of the satra institution with the State till the British occupation. From the earliest times the kingship in India was never regarded purely as a political office devoid of any religious significance. The king was the upholder of *dharma* and the defender of the established faith. Therefore, any religious movement of revolutionary nature was naturally looked upon with an eye of suspicion and hostility, until it could prove itself to be beneficial to society and largely accepted by the public.

The neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement and the satra institution of Assam, did not have a smooth-sailing progress in the early part of its history. But later on, in spite of royal indifference or hostility, when it became firmly established and widely spread, the Government had to acknowledge it as an established fact and afterwards patronised many a satra. But it is futile to seek a clear and consistent religious policy either on the part of the Ahom monarchs or of the Koch kings of western Assam with regard to the Vaiṣṇava movement. The religious attitude of the State towards the Vaiṣṇava movement was more or less determined by the temperament of the different kings and the exigencies of time. Towards the later part of the Ahom rule (in the eighteenth century) when numerous satras sprang up in different parts of Assam, some sort of state supervision impelled by a political rather than religious motive, became necessary.

Early relation: Owing to the hostile attitude of the Ahom monarch, Śaṅkaradeva at the initial stage of his proselytising career had to move out with his followers to the Koch kingdom about the middle of the 16th century A.D. But here too, the reformers could not peacefully pursue his proselitising work for long. He was misrepresented several times before Naranārāyaṇa, the contemporary Koch king, by some interested persons. Once he was saved from being molested at the hands of the king's officers by the timely intervention of Prince Śukladhvaja, who at the critical moment had him removed to his own house. The officers, failing in their attempt to arrest Śaṅkaradeva, subjected two of his disciples to untold humiliations. Of course, he came out, with flying colours, of the religious disputation arranged by the king.[1] Allegations against him was that he did not observe, nay, prohibited the observance of the established practices of the Hindu religion. Similarly Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva were expelled from eastern Koch kingdom by Raghunārāyaṇa and Parīkṣitanārāyaṇa for their alleged revolutionary religious ideas and beliefs.[2]

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[1] Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkaracarita,* p. 262ff.
Rāmānanda : *Guru-carita* pp. 266-289.

Ultimately when a considerable section of people embraced the new faith and the true nature of the faith became firmly established, the Koch monarchs of both the eastern and western Kāmarūpa began to take a kindly view. Lakshmīnārāyaṇa (1584—1622), Vīranārāyaṇa (1622—1633) and Prāṇanārāyṇa (1633—1666) of western Koch Kingdom and Dharmanārayāṇa (1615—1637) and Mahendranārāyaṇa (1637—1643), of the eastern Koch kingdom encouraged and patronised the Vaiṣṇavites by granting land and money towards the establishment of satras. A glance at the history of satras of western Assam will reveal the names of several kings who were associated with the foundations of many a satra.

But the history of Vaiṣṇavism in eastern Assam presents a more chequered career. We have already described (Chapter IV) how the pioneer reformer Vaṁśgopāladeva had to live in concealment for several years and how his satra at Kalābārī was set on fire under the orders of Burhā-rajā Pratāp Siṁha. Mukunda Gosāin and Balabhadra Ātā, two of Gopāladeva's colleagues were beheaded. Gopāladeva's successor Miśradeva also died in the prison and his satra at Kuruwābāhi was demolished at the instance of Pratāpa Siṁha. Edward Gait, celebrated historian of Assam, writes, "At the instigation of the interested Brahmins the Mahapuruṣiyā (i.e., Vaiṣṇavas) whose tenets were rapidly gaining ground were subjected to much persecution and several of their gosāins were put to death."[3]

Persecution by Gadādhara Siṁha: The Vaiṣṇavites fared no better during the reign of Pratāpa Siṁha's successors. The fourth *adhikāra* Nityānandadeva of the Māyāmarā satra was put to death by Suramphā's (1641—1644) orders and several attempts were made to kill Bar-Yadumaṇi of Bāhbāri satra suspecting his loyalty to the king. Subsequently, his three sons including Sanātanadeva the *satrādhikāra* of the Dihing satra, were either killed or tortured at the instance of the then king Nariyā Rajā for their alleged conspiracy against the king without proper inquiry into the truth of the allegation. Even Jayadhvaja Siṁha (1648—1663) who was instrumental in establishing the four great Brahminical satras of eastern Assam, was not absolutely free from persecuting the Vaiṣṇavas. "He persecuted the Mahāpuruṣiyā sect and killed some of their leading members."[4] From Chankradhvaja Siṁha (1663—1669) to the accession of Gadādhara Siṁha in 1681, the Vaiṣṇavites lived and preached somewhat peacefully. This happened because of the preoccupation of the kings and nobles in wars with the Mahmmedans and in internecine struggle within.

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[2] Daityāri Ṭhākur : *Śaṅkarodeva-Mādhavdeva-carita*, pp. 347-359.
Ramrāya Dvija : *Gurulīlā*, p. 122f.

[3] E. Gait : *History of Assam*, p. 121.

But with the accession of Gadādhara Siṁha to the throne in 1881 A.D., the royal persecution of the innocent Vaiṣṇavites reached the climax. The reasons, uniformly given in all the chronicles, is that while Gadādhara Siṁha was moving from place to place in disguise to save himself from being killed by the agents of the king, he was maltreated by some of devotees of the Dakhiṇapāt satra. This he took to his heart and waited for an opportunity to wreck vengeance upon them. During this period he noticed the wealth, pomp and grandeurs of the Dakhiṇpāt satra and he also observed that the satra was a miniature State with functionaries like *Borā, Śaikiā* etc. His notion of the satra institution as a menace to the State was further confirmed by his experience in other satras. He considered the satras, though erroneously, to be States within the State, as such, a menace to the sovereignty of the State. On coming to power he immediately confiscated the properties of satras and idols of deities were either thrown away or melted down. The eyes of the *adhikāra-gosāin* of the Dakhiṇapāṭ satra were put out, while the *adhikāra* of the Āuniāti satra was exiled to Sadiya. Under his orders, most of the Gosāins (heads of the satras) were sent to Nāmrup, a place of penal servitude where some of them were put to death, while others were subjected to such manual labour as were required in the construction of roads.[5] Sir Edward Gait writes in this connection;

"The neo-Vaiṣṇavite sects, founded on the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva had now attained remarkable dimensions. The country was full of religious preceptors and their followers, who claimed exemption from universal liability to fight and to assist in the construction of roads and tanks and other public works. This caused serious inconvenience. - - - - - He bore however a personal grudge against some of the leading Gosāins for having refused to shelter him in the days when he was hiding and for having endeavoured to dissuade the Barphukan from his design to set him up as king in the place of Larā-Rajā. He, therefore, resolved to break their power for good and all. Under his orders many of them were sent to Nāmrup and put to death there. ... ... Nor did their Bhakats or disciples fare much better. Those belonging to the better castes, such as Ganaks, Kāyasthas, Kalitās were left alone, but those of low castes such as Keots, Kochas, Doms and Haris were haunted down, robbed of their properties and forced to eat flesh of swine, cows and fowls. Many of them were deported to out-of-the-way places and made to work as Coolies on the roads ; other were multilated, other were put to death and a few were offered up as sacrifices to idols. The persecution spread far and wide and at last no one of any persuation was safe if he had anything worth taking. When the king found that things had reached this pass he ordered the persecution to be stopped and restitution to be made in all cases where people had been wrongly despoiled."[6]

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[4] Ibid, p. 140.

[5] S. K. Bhuyan (edited) : *Taṅgkhuṅgiā Burañjī*, pp. 14, 26.
&
" " :*Asamar Padya Burañjī*, pp. 28, 32.

Rudra Siṁha's attitude : The above description of Mr Gait is not at all exaggeration. It is also borne out by evidences of almost all the contemporary chronicles and *carita-puthis.* There might be certain political justification in suppressing or curbing the excessive growth of the Vaiṣṇavite monasteries, but the measures taken were too severe. With the accession of Rudra Siṁha to the throne in 1696, the Vaiṣṅavas could heave a sigh of relief, for, the new monarch showed a conciliatory spirit in his attitude towards the Vaiṣṇavite sects. He recalled and reinstated the exiled or deported Gosāins in their former positions and allowed to resume their old avocations subject to certain limitations.

But in spite of this liberal attitude shown towards the Vaiṣṇavite proselytisers he seemed to have developed, under the influence of Brahmins, certain prejudices against the non-Brahmin Gosāins. The persecutions over the Śūdra Medhis or Gosāins ceased no doubt, but they were strictly forbidden to initiate or ordain Brahmins. For contravening this order of the king, the Māyāmarā Gosāin and a few others were punished, and the Gosāin of the Kamalābārī satra was publicly whipped for preaching against the worship of idols.[7] But in spite of one or two stringent measures adopted against the non-Brahmin Gosains, Rudra Siṁha's general policy towards the Vaiṣṇava sects was liberal. He made for the first time a comprehensive list of satras and gave official recognition to those that were included in the list.[8] Thus the tradition of *eṭakā-mahanta,* a vague term no doubt, still prevalent amongst the Vaiṣṇavas, probably originated from the time of Rudra Siṁha. A rupee at that time consisted of twelve hundred eighty cowries and the medium of exchange was mainly cowries. *Eṭakā-mahanta,* therefore, may be a collective name of twelve hundred eighty officially recognised Mahantas, or sixtyfour Mahantas, as that number of pice constituted a rupee.

Māyāmarīyā revolt and after : Śiva Siṁha, son of Rudra Siṁha, was a disciple of a Śākta Brahmin of Bengal and his eldest queen Phuleśvarī who virtually became the king assuming the epithet *Bar-rajā* was also a fanatic

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[6] E. Gait : *History of Assam,* p. 168f.

[7] S. K. Bhuyan (edited) : *Tuṅgkhuṅgtā Burañjī,* p. 31.

[8] Govinda Dasa : *Santa-saṁpradā* (Ms. No. 128, D.H.A.S.)
&
L. N. Bejbaruā (edited) : *Bāhi,* vol. V, part I, p. 567.

Śākta. She assumed a vindictive attitude towards the Vaiṣṇava Gosains, particularly against the *ṭhākuriyā* Gosāins who would not worship idols or perform *pūjās*. They were made to bow down their heads to *sālagrāma* stone, and even she went to the extent of forcibly applying frontal marks (*tilakas*) with blood of sacrificed goats. This fanatical zeal on the part of the power-intoxicated queen greatly exasperated the feelings of the Vaiṣṇava Gosains, of whom the Māyāmarā Gosāin who commanded eight lacs of disciples swore vengeance upon the king. The Māyāmarā Mahanta's rise to prosperity and influence roused the misgivings of the Ahom Government. The Mahanta gave indications of the political intent by comparing his eminence to that of the Ahom sovereign. His disciples would not bow their heads to the Ahom king, a circumstance which could not be reconciled to their position as a subject people. The attitude of the Ahom Government towards the Māyāmara Mahanta was one of suspicion, and hence curbing the power of the Mahantas, was a matter of common political expedience. Execution of Nityānanda Mahanta by Bhagā Rajā marked the beginning of atrocities. Fifty years after the execution of Nityānanda, another Mahanta Vaikuṇṭhanāthadeva was put to death by Gadādhara Siṁha. Frequent insults and atrocities in the succeeding periods, ultimately drove the Māyāmarā Gosāin and his followers to open rebellion. Further persecutions and insults heaped upon the disciples of the Māyāmarā Gosāin during the reign of Rājeśvara Siṁha (1751-1759) and Lakṣmī Siṁha who were all Śāktas, goaded the disciples, known as Maṭaks and Marāṇs, to retributive actions.

The transformation of the Māyāmariyās from a religious sect into a fighting and ruling body was not the outcome of accident or the successful enterprise of any individual adventurer. It was the culmination of an urge coming spontaneously from the hearts of the people bound together by common sufferings at the hands of the enemy. There was never a tribe called the Māyāmariyā, but their unification for the purpose of resistance to the Ahom government was so complete that they appeared to have possessed al the characteristics of a regular tribal organisation. The solidarity of the Māyāmariyās was kept by their common desire to avenge the insults heaped upon their Gurus by Ahom sovereigns and nobles to which several new factors were afterwards added.[9]

They were biding time and secretely prepared for an open rebellion, under the leadership of Rāgha Marāṇ and Nāhar Khorā, two of the leading disciples of the Māyāmarā Gosāin. Rājeśwar Siṁha foresaw this danger from the quarter of the Māyāmara disciples and therefore, to counteract that, he made friendship with Cikan Gosāin of the Dihing satra, an equally powerful satra belonging to the same sub-sect.[10]

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[9] S. K. Bhuyan : *Anglo-Assamese Relations,* pp. 205, 254.

[10] " : *Asamar Padya Burañjī,* p. 83ff.

But in the reign of Laksmī Siṁha, the Māyāmariyās mainly composed of Morāṇs, openly rose against the king and after defeating the royalists at several encounters, ultimately occupied Rangpur, the capital. The king was kept confined in the temple of Jayasāgar. Ramākanta, a son of the insurgent leader Nāhar Khorā was installed as the king. *Adhikāra-gosāins* of the four important satras, viz., Āuniāti, Garamūr, Dakṣinapāṭ and Kuruvābāhi were forced to acknowledge the superiority of the Māyāmarā Gosāin and to secure their release they had to pay a few thousand rupees as ransom. .The Gosāin of Āuniāti and Dakṣiṇapāt had to pay eight thousand rupees each, while those of other two had to pay four thousand each. Gosāins of other satras were also forced to pay ransome to escape humiliation.[11]

Laksmī Siṁha was however, restored to the throne by a successful counter-revolution and the Māyāmariyās including their Gosāin were killed. The Māyāmariyās though subdued temporarily, soon gathered up their strength for a fresh rebellion during the reign of the next king Gaurīnātha Siṁha (1780-1795). The royal armies were overpowered at several encounters. The royalists were helped by the disciples of Dihing, Garāmur and other satras at different encounters against the Māyāmariyās, but to no avail. Ultimately the leaving his capital to fate he left for Gauhati in search of a shelter. As a result, the whole of Eastern Assam came practically under the domination of the Māyāmariyās, the leading members of whom proclaimed themselves kings of various parts of the country. At long last, Gaurinātha Siṁha with the help of the English regained his throne by overthrowing the Māyāmariyā regime in 1793. After the restoration, a ruthless policy was adopted against the Māyāmariyās and a large number of them were put to death.

The Māyāmariyā rebellion is the only instance where a satra could be seen involved in a political embroil. But it must be said to the credit of the Māyāmarā Gosāin, that though they implicated themselves at the initial stage of the rebellion lured by powed and prestige, they had no control over later developments. The history of the relation of satras with the State after 1793; till the Burmese invasion of 1817, is without any notable events. The Burmese invasion and oppression from 1817 to 1825 practically threw the entire country out of gear. Satras were sacked and set on fire, Gosāins and disciples fled for their lives leaving everything to the mercy of the barbarous invaders. As a result, many valuable manuscripts and images and such other treasures of arts and letters were lost for ever. Whatever remained after seven years of barbarous invasion, formed only a part of the original treasures. With the establishment of the British reign in

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[11] S. K. Bhuyan : *Tuṅgkhuṅgiā Burañjī*, p. 66.

1826, the Gosāins and the disciples returned to their original satras, then mostly in ruins, and on production of sufficient evidences, satras were granted lands free of revenue or at nominal revenue. But a close contact between the State and satras practically ceased here. The British followed a policy of non-intervention in the sphere of religion, and satras were left to their own fate.

In the foregoing discussions, it can be noticed that the Vaiṣṇava movement and the satra institution did not find favour with the ruling monarchs at the initial stage. The cause of this hostile attitude was partly supplied by the revolutionary nature of the new faith and the institution, and partly supplied by jealousy of the priestly class or other interested persons who instigated the kings against the new order. This hostile attitude was more pronounced in the case of Ahom monarchs of eastern Assam than the Koch kings of Kāmarūpa and Cooch-Behar.

Royal recognition: From Jayadhavaja Siṁha (1649-1663 A.D.) till Ratnadhvaja Siṁha (1679-1681 A.D.) the monarchs and the nobles were adherent of Vaiṣṇava Gosāins and the most important satras of eastern Assam were established under their patronage. In spite of the initial persecution, Vaiṣṇavism survived and established a net-work of satras throughout Assam. Even severe and brutal presecution by Gadādhara Siṁha could not root out its existence. So, Rudra Siṁha felt the necessity of changing the policy of persecution carried out by his father. Towards the later part of the Ahom rule, mainly prompted by political motive, an officer known as *satrīyā-baruā* was appointed to look after the workings and management of satras.[12] The necessity of such an officer to inspect and look after the satras was felt as the some satras were found sometimes harbouring claimants and pretenders to the throne. The duty of the *satriyā-baruā* was to inspect various satras occasionally and recommend steps to be taken in various matters concerning satras. In the investiture ceremonies of satras he used to represent the king and proclaimed, before the assembly of disciples and Gosains, the orders of the king appointing or nominating the new incumbent to the Adhikāraship. His further duty was to advise and remind the new *adhikāra* of the duties towards the king and the State.[13]

Towards the later part of the Ahom rule, a new custom in the shape of blessing the king by the heads of the principal satras on the occasion of the coronation ceremony came into vogue.

On such an occasion the heads of different satras in order of precedence were formally ushered in to the presence of the new king. They, according to their status determined by the court, interviewed the king and offered religious advice and blessing. The four principal satras (*cāri-satra*) of Mājuli generally used to get precedence over other satras in this respect. The *Tuṅgkhuṅgia Burañjī* records such a custom of blessing the king by *satrādhikāras* on the occasion of the coronation ceremonies of Pramatta Siṁha (1744-1751), Rajeśvara Siṁha (1751-1769) and Gaurīnātha Siṁha (1780-1794).[14] In major satras which kept constant liaison with the court, a custom arose whereby a newly investitured *satrādhikara* used to present himself to the king officially on an appointed day; the latter formally received the new *satrādhikara* in conformity with the status of the satra.[15]

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[12] Op. cit. p. 31; Govinda Das : *Santa-saṁpradā*, Chapt. V, (Ms. No. 128, D.H.A.S.)

[13] Maniram Barbhandar Barua : *Burañji-viveka-ratna*, (Ms. No. 108, D.H.A.S.)

Royal visit to satras: The custom of visiting the principal satras by each king at least once in his tenure of office came into vogue towards the later part of the Ahom rule. Maṇirām Barbhāṇḍarbaruā in *Burañji-vivekaratna* gives a vivid description of royal visits to satras and the status given to the heads of different satras in the Ahom court. Instances of royal visit to satras were marked by unusual gaity and pomp and reference to such visits are to be found in the chronicles. The *Tuṅgkhuṅgiā Burañjī* records the visits of Gaurīnātha Siṁha and Kamaleśwara Siṁha to Āuniāti, Daksiṇapāṭ and Narowā satras.[16] Whenever the king intended to visit a particular satra he conveyed it through Barbarua or Satrīyā Baruā to the head of the satra fixing a particular date in advance. The *satrādhikār* would make an elaborate arrangement as far as the means of the satra permitted to receive the august personality.

In the four great satras of Mājuli, the occasion of the royal visit was marked by usual pomp and dignity. Rows of plantain trees were planted on the both sides of the road leading from the prayer hall to outward gate with mango leaves and twigs (*āmrapallava*) hung from one row to the other. Pots filled with water (*pūrṇakumbha*) and caskets of various fruits and flowers arranged in an orderly manner were kept on the both sides of way. The prayer hall was decorated with beautiful overhanging canopies, and festoon and carpets of various designs bedecked the floor. When the king with his usual retinue approached the outer gate, he was received by junior *satrādhikāra* with flowers and incense. The king was then escorted by musical parties (*gāyana-bāyana*) to the inner-gate of the satra where the senior *adhikāra* received him as before with flowers, incense and presents. Here in the inner gate the king used to descend from his litter and went on foot led by the senior *adhikāra* through the prayer hall to the inner shrine (*maṇikūṭ*). After paying due obeisance to the idol he used to take his seat specially arranged for him in the prayer hall along with his retinue. The senior *adhikāra* then acquainted him with the details of the satra and the king gave his opinion or decision accordingly. He was entertained at night by dramatic and musical performance. Finally, when the king came out of the satra to depart, the Gosain with their musical parties accompanied him to the outer gate. The king usually repayed sumptuously in return for the reception accorded to him.[17]

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[14] S. K. Bhuyan (edtied) : *Tungkhungiā Burañjī*, pp. 45, 86.
[15] M. Barbhāṇḍar-Baruā : *Burañjī-viveka-ratna* (Ms).
[16] S. K. Bhuyan (edited) : *Tungkhungiā Burañjī*, pp. 92, 168f.

Allotment of seats to heads of satras in the court: In the course of dealings of the Ahom royal court with the satras, the heads of various satras also came to occupy allotted places in the hierarchy of official status and position. A regular gradation of satras was made keeping in view of their size, power and prestige and seats were allotted in the royal court accordingly. To the four great satras of Majuli (Āuniāṭi, Dakhiṇapāṭ, Garamūr and Kuruwābāhi) was allotted the first row. They had the privilege of directly addressing the king without any intermediary and they could personally offer blessing to the king touching the latter's head. They were allowed to sit on soft blankets with pillows to lean on in the presence of the king. The king used to address them as *bāpu*. In the same line, but at a little distance, the heads of three main branches of above satras, viz, Saru-Garamūr, Phutukicāpari and Difalu, could sit. They also enjoyed almost the same privileges which their parent satras enjoyed. Seats in second row were generally meant for Dihing, Śalaguri, Beṅgenā-āti and Māyāmarā. But after the religious insurrection during the reign of Lakṣmī Siṁha and Gaurīnātha Siṁha, in which the Māyāmarā satra was implicated, the *adhikāra-gosāin* of the Māyāmara satra was debarred from sitting in the same row with the Gosāins of the above satras. Gosains of the second row could also sit on soft blankets with pillows to recline on. The third row was generally reserved for Norowā, Kowāmarā, Dīghalī and Cāmaguri satras. These four satras, as stated elsewhere, were established by the great-grandsons of Śaṅkaradeva. They used to sit on mattresses with pillows. In the next row *bar-bārajanīyā* Gosains of Aleṅgi, Letugraām, Cupahā, Kaicuṅgiyā etc. were permitted to sit. The next two successive rows of seats were intended for important satras of the Kāla Saṁhati (excluding Dihing and Māyāmara) and of the Nikā Saṁhati. The Gosāin of Kamalābīrī satra occupied the first seat reserved for the Nikā Saṁhati satras. Gosains of these satras were also allowed to sit on mattresses with or without pillows according to their status. But Gosains of less important satras had to sit on bare plantain leaves in the presence of the king. There were slight addition or alterations in the order of seats from time to time as a result of patronage shown by the high-ranking officers to this or that satra, but the front row occupied by the four satras of Mājuli remained constant. The special privilege of directly addressing the king without an intermediary belonged only to the front rankers.[18]

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[17] M. Barbhāṇḍar-Baruā : *Burañji-viveka-ratna* (Ms).

Effects of royal influence: The satra system originally came into existence for the effective propagation and practice of the Vaiṣṇava faith. In the then existing circumstances it was considered a more effective organ of propagation, than sporadic or stray attempts of individuals. It was not intended to be an instrument for gaining power or prestige. Simplicity, austerity and devotional zeal marked its beginning. But when this institution gradually came within the sphere of the court influence and consequently when inter-relation between the court and satras developed, a noticeable change in the outlook of the propagators took place. They began to move around the court seeking royal favour and patronage and thereby attempted to increase their power and affluence. Simplicity and austerity which marked the beginning of the satra institution gradually gave place to love of power and prestige. As a natural corollary to this acquisition of power and wealth, courtly formalities and customs began to gain ground in the dealings of the affluent satras. For instance, direct access to the *adhikāra-gosāin* without an intermediary became difficult for the disciples, and the movements of the Gosāin within and out-side the satra campus came to be more stately and pompous. Free and frank exchange of ideas between disciples and their Gurus became difficult owing to the increasing number of formalities. In short, the wealthy satras developed an atmosphere of courtly formalities and etiquette. This development, no doubt, lent colour and dignity to satras but at the same time it created an artificial bar between Gurus and their disciples. On the one hand, it gave rise to a sense of reverential awe in the mind of disciples which cannot altogether be ruled out as unnecessary, on the other hand, it removed, to a considerable extent, the intimate personal contact between religious preceptors and their disciples.

In conclusion, it must be admitted that the history of the satra institution would have taken a different turn but for the royal patronage which helped it to tide over difficulties that confronted it. The royal patronage placed many satras on a sound economic footing and thereby helped them to pay exclusive attention to the pursuit of religion and culture. It cannot be denied that the satras which largely contributed towards the cultural development of Assam and have still preserved the sombre appearance of a religious institution, are those satras which received royal help at one time or other. Freedom from economic worries gave opportunities to those living under the protection of the satra to cultivate the art of dancing, music, wood-carving and painting etc. besides usual religious duties.

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[18] Opp. cit. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER X

CONCLUDING REVIEW

In the preceding chapters the history of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement in Assam started by Śaṅkaradeva and the growth of the institution through which that movement manifested and developed have been traced. The single-minded devotion to Kṛṣṇa under the guidance of a Guru and the cultivation of Bhakti in the association of holy persons as enjoined in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa,* constitute the main feature of the faith. To create such an atmosphere where companionship of devotees and guidance of a Guru could be procured in the same place, the satra institution was brought into existence and it became a well-organised and a popular institution within a century of its inception.

The movement commenced in the first decade of the sixteenth century and reached its climax towards the middle of the seventeenth century. By the end of the first quarter of the seventeenth century, three sub-sects and two seceding sects having minor differences in exoteric and esoteric observances sprang up. By the end of that century the most fruitful period of the Vaiṣṇavism in Assam also came to an end and the galaxy of Vaiṣṇava stalwarts disappeared from the religious firmament. The later history of the faith and the sub-sects is marked by the expansion of the satra institution throughout the entire Brahmaputra valley and the stereotyped proselytising process and religious activities continued unabated. Difficulties, hardships and opposition from the State that confronted the religious reformers of the first two centuries of the history of the movement practically ceased with the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Vaiṣṇava religion and the satra institution by this time got itself firmly rooted to the soil and the royal authority had to acknowledge it as a *fait accompli*. Proselytisers by this time found a more peaceful and accommodating atmosphere to preach their faith and consequently numerous branch satras were established by family members and disciples of the principal religious proselytisers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The period between 1650-1800 may properly be called the era of the growth of the branch-satras (*śākhā-satra*). As a result, every Assamese village came under the religious influence of one or the other of satras and even its influence gradually penetrated into the neighbouring tribal areas. The emergence of the *nāmaghar* as the forum of all religious and cultural activities is the direct result of the growing popularity of the satra institution.

According to *the District Gazetteers of Assam (1905)* eighty percent of the Hindus of the Assam Valley are Vaiṣṇavities. Districtwise percentages of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts to the total Hindu population have been given respectively as 90, 98, 72, 90, 68, 62, percent respectively.[1] The high percentage of Vaiṣṇavites in Assam Valley speaks eloquently of the proselytising activities of the satra institution. We can get an idea of the proselytising activities of satras in the eighteenth century from the fact that the Māyāmarā satra, one of so many satras, claimed on the eve of the Māyāmarīyā insurrection eight lacs of disciples. The then *adhikāra* made a survey of his disciples and found the above figure after a thorough counting. But the religious activities of satras received two staggering blows within fifty years from 1770 to 1820 from the two political upheavals in the shape of the Māyāmarīyā rebellion and the Burmese invasion. The adverse effect of these two political upsurges was great and some satras were destroyed totally and properties of others were looted or set on fire. With the British occupation of the country in 1826, many satras were revived and restored to their former position, and they were allowed freely to pursue their evangelical avocation. The impact of western civilization and the growth of rationalistic ideas amongst the people have stood on the way of its further expansion and the process of gradual decadence has already set in. But in spite of many handicaps and difficulties, it is still surviving as a living institution with considerable influence upon the villagers.

The importance of the institution does not lie alone on its religious activities. It has contributed much to the cultural development of the Assamese people. It gave a rich religious literature, revived and popularised the art of classical music and dance, introduced dramatic performance, encouraged handicrafts and introduced the art of manuscript painting. The elevation of socially backward people by presenting before them a higher and healthier conducts of life, the opening of the portals of a monotheistic religions to all alike irrespective of caste and sex, the loosening of the caste rigorousness by recognising the value and equality of all beings at the spiritual level, the spread of learning through Assamese versions of Sanskrit scriptures, the popularisation of ethical virtues like kindness non-violence, obedience etc. amongst the villagers, and above all the fostering of a spirit of fellow-feeling or a bond of unity amongst persons of different parts of the country, are some of the notable social contributions of the Vaiṣṇava movement and the satra institution.

But no institution can claim perfection and the satra is not an exception. The unusual multiplication of satras during the later part of the seventeenth century and after, cannot be ascribed solely to the evangelical motive. Allurement of money, power and prestige cannot be altogether ruled out of the motive behind the foundation of so many satras. Brothers and other members of the same family are frequently seen founding different satras in stead of devoting themselves to the cause of the ancestral satra. The chronicles of several satras contain accounts of friction among members of the same family on the question of succession to the headship, and establishment of seperate satras consequently. The history of Māyāmarā, Dihiṅg and Elengi satras furnishes illustration of such internal dissension. Tithes and offerings given by disciples and honour and prestige associated with the headship of a satra provided sufficient allurement to establish new satras. Moreover, the principle of hereditary succession to the headship, as adopted by most of them, sometimes elevated unworthy persons to the headship resulting in internal fueds and the lowering of the religious standard of satras concerned. With the extension of the royal patronage to a few satras, attempts to bring the nobles and if possible the princess within the fold, and thereby increase their sphere of influence, could be noticed in the cases of many sastras. They began to consider themselves fortunate if they could somehow, through the help of their influential disciples, procure honoured seats in the royal court. The greatness of a satra no longer depended upon the religious attainments, but upon the power and prestige secured in the royal court. Satras favoured by kings began to get precedence over satras without such patronage in other spheres also.[2]

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[1] *Assam District Gazetters* : 1905; Goalpara, p. 53; Darrang p. 97; Kamrup, p. 95; Nowgong, p. 96; Sibsagar, p. 95; Lakhimpur, p. 123.

As a result of constant intercourse with the courtly atmosphere, satras favoured by the Kings and nobles began to enhance their outward show by adopting courtly formalities, pomp and grandeur. Others also tried to imitate them as far as possible. In the *Rāmagopāla-carita* there is an interesting comparison between heads of satras of eastern and western Assam. Rāmānanda, head of Āhātaguri satra who lived during the last decade of the seventeenth century, is said to have remarked to one of his disciples pointing out the difference between religious heads of the two parts of the country in the following way : "Religious heads can maintain themselves here and are recognised by people if they can make a show of luxury and pomp. Therefore, they require soft cushion, big pillows to recline, beautiful trays of brass, and fine mattresses having floral design to sit on and costly clothes to put on. But religious heads of Kāmarūpa and Behar are not in need of such things to get recognition as sadhus. They use simple things made of bamboo and wood, put on simple white cotton cloths and can perform their prayers sitting on mattresses made of ribs of the plantain leaf. There (Western Assam), the simplicity is considered the charactersistic of religious persons".[3] Even some heads of satras went to the length of using royal insignia viz., *kekõrādolā* (litter specially designed for the Kings) and *ārowān* (type of umbrella use by the Kings).[4] Of course they had to pay dearly for such audacity on their part whenever it came to the notice of the kings. The fourth *adhikāra* of the Māyāmarā satra, Nityānanda, openly proclaimed in a non-chalant manner the equality of the status of his family with that of reigning royal dynasty, viz., Tuṅgkhungiā dynasty.[5]

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[2] Maṇirām Barbhāṇḍar Barua : *Burañjī-vivekaratna* (transcript Vol.XII).

[3] *āta anantare prabhu āchanta basiyā* l
Hairāmaka cāhi raṅge bolanta hāsiyā ll

The crave for power and prestige and the love of wealth gradually tended to replace simplicity and sincerity by formality. The intimate and sincere relationship between *adhikāras* and their disciples, as we find in the early period of the movement, gradually gave place to formal relationship. Direct approach without an intermediary ceased to exist. On the whole the relationship between the heads of satras and their disciples became to a certain extent artificial. Of course, it is not true to say that all satras developed the above characteristics ; it is specially true in the case of satras which imbibed courtly formalities.

The multiplication of satras adversely affected the country in another way also. During the later part of the Ahom rule, satras served as an asylum to those who tried to escape from the compulsory labour in connection with works of public utility during the Ahom rule. Hundreds of able-bodied person putting on devotee's garb sought refuge in satras. As noted in the preceding chapter, Gadādhara Siṁha had to take unusually stern action against this tendency on the part of his subjects. The non-violent teaching and insistence on simple diet probably affected also the martial quality of the people. The people who could successfully resist several mighty Mughal invasions, strangely enough, succumbed to the untrained weaponless Māyāmarīyās in the last part of the eighteenth century and to a few thousand Burmese soldiers in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. There might have been many reasons for this physical and martial

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ito rājye pravarttive tevese pāray 1
Kataki-tulita sāj basibe lāgay 11
bṛhat bālica lāge śarāi sundar 1
puṣpe viracita kaṭha bhakat vistar 11
uttam vasana lāge gāwat rañjit 1
sehi jana sādhu bulī jānay ahit 11
āmār rājyar śunā sādhur lakṣaṇ 1
vāṁśa karaṇḍit guvā karay bhojan 11
vāṁśar cuṅgāt carvvanaka pelāway 1
dopāti vasan gāwe rañjit karay 11
śuklā bhuṇi paridhān tanur madhyat 1
gāmocha pindhiyā thāke uttam aṅgat 11
rambhādhārī kaṭhe basi nāmak gāway 1
sehi jana sādhu buli tahit jānay. 11

Ramagapala-carita, transcript No. 113 ; D.H.A.S. ; verses, 1901-4.

[4] Dutirām Hāzarikā ; *Dihing Satrar Vaṁśāvalī* (transcript No. 136 D.) vv. 616-624.

[5] S .K. Bhuyan : *Anglo-Assamese Relations,* p. 145 ;

deterioration, but the influence of Vaiṣṇavism as one of the factors cannot be altogether denied.

A fatalistic and other-worldly attitude fostered by the vaiṣṇavite teachings which creates an impression that everything of our life is predestined and that the worldly life is futile tended to destroy the martial spirit of the people. They began to develop an aversion towards military actions which compel man, sometimes, to be violent and vindictive. How Vaiṣṇavite ideas coloured the attitude of the people could be judged from the fact that the political historian like Dutiram Hāzarika, the writer of the *Padya Burañjī* and the political personality like Manjay Barbarua ascribed the reverses sustained by the royal army at the hands of the Māyāmarīyās to the activity of the inscrutable fate.[6] Hearing the news of the victory of the insurgents during the reign of Gaurīnātha Siṁha (1780-1794) one of his ministers, viz., Manjay Barubarua remarked : "Our soldiers have previously defeated even the Mughals ; but now they are even afraid to face the Moāmarīyās. Such a turn of fortune takes place surely because of the will of God and Goddess. Therefore, the whirl of time is too powerful to comprehend." The following comment of Sir Edward Gait on the physical deterioration of the Ahoms may broadly be applied to other tribes also which embraced Hinduism ; "By accepting a subordinate place in the hierarchy of Hinduism, not only did the Ahoms lose their pride of race and martial spirit, but with a less nourishing diet their physic also underwent a change for the worse".[7]

The later history of the satra institution is also marked by the growing spirit of conservatism and orthodoxy in place of catholicity which characterised the early period of the movement.

In some satras women and socially backward people were debarred from entering the prayer halls.[8] Intolerance of the beliefs of other sects, undue supremacy given to tradition, attention paid to the letters rather than to the spirit of rules and regulations, and similar trends have made the institution a less progressive one. Instances of sons refusing to take food prepared by their parents because they happen to be uninitiated, though pious and clean, are not rare.

Because of this gradual loss of the dynamic quality, the satra institution at present no longer enjoys the same enviable status which it used to enjoy formerly. Unless it adapts itself to the changing circumstances, its future can not be assured.

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[6] op.cit " (edited) : *Tuṅgkhuṅgiā Burañjī*, p. 106 ;
Asamar Padya Burañji, pp. 100, 112.

[7] E. Gait : *History of Assam*, p. 185.

[8] A few years back, a successful agitation led by the schedule-caste community demanding entry into the *kīrtana-ghar* of the Barpeta Satra may be noted in this connection. Even now, women-folk are not allowed to enter into the prayer hall of Barpeṭa and Bardowā satras.

APPENDIX I

CAITANYA VAIṢṆAVISM IN ASSAM

There have been in existence since the beginning of the eighteenth century a few satras in Assam professing Vaiṣṇavism of Bengal. Their influence is very much limited and include not more than a few hundred families as their disciples. Though these satras are affiliated to the school of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, their organisational side is purely modelled on the lines of the satras of Assam Vaiṣṇavism.

Though the faith propagated by Caitanya never took the form of a popular religion in Assam and though its hold was never strong on any part of Assam during the last few centuries, yet references to its stray existence in western part of Assam as far back as the sixteenth century of the Christian era could be found in the *Carita-puthis*. No systematic attempt to propagate that faith was made in Assam during the initial stage of its history. During the life-time of Caitanya the faith was firmly established not only in Bengal but in Orissa too. But neither Caitanya nor any of his principal followers came to Assam to propagate the faith in a systematic way. It does not, however, mean that Assam was completely unaware of *Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavism*. The medieval biographies contain a few references from which it is known that the cult of Caitanya silently penetrated to western part of Assam towards the middle of the sixteenth century through the propagation of some unknown adherents of this faith. According to the medieval biographies of Śaṅkaradeva, Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākur *alias* Ṭhākur Ātā was preparing to get himself initiated to Vaiṣṇavism of Bengal when accidentally he met Śaṅkaradeva. After his meeting with Śaṅkaradeva, he gave up the idea of becoming a follower of the Bengal school of Vaiṣṇavism.[1] Mathurādās Ātā and Gopāla Ātā, two of the principal disciples of Mādhavadeva were followers of the school of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism before they were admitted and initiated to the Vaiṣṇavism of Assam.[2] Some of the biographers of Damadaradeva have stated that he was a disciple of Caitanyadeva and one of them has even gone to the length of saying that the saint of Bengal remained for some time as a sanyāsin in a cave near Hajo, a place situated at a distance of fifteen miles from Gauhati.[3] Hari Bhāratī, grandfather of Ramākānta the biographer of Vanamālideva, was propbably an adherent of the school of Vaiṣṇavism founded by Caitanya. Ramākānta, in his colophon, has stated that Hari Bhāratī practised and professed sixteen names (*ṣola-nāma*) of Hari.[4] Sixteen names referred to in the biography most probably indicated the sixteen names of Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavism. Ramākānta belonged to the second half of the seventeenth century ; therefore his grandfather must have lived in the last quarter of the sixteenth century A.D.

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[1] Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhakur : *Śaṅkara-carita*, p. 200 ; *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 86.

[2] U. C. Lekharu (edited) : *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 265 ; *Gopāla Ātār Carita*, p. 18.

The above references indicate that Vaiṣṇvism of Bengal propagated by Caitanya was not unknown in the sixteenth century when Śankaradeva propagated his own fiath. Probabaly it could not make any head-way in the face of the growing movement conducted by Śaṅkaradeva and the concerted and systematic propagation made by his followers.

Towards the beginning of the seventeenth century, two brothers belonging to the family of Nityānanda came to Assam with a few followers. These two brothers, Rāmacandra and Rāmabhadra, settled in Kāmarupa with their followers. Their descendants in course of time moved to different places where they established a few satras.[5] The satras founded by them, at present, are known as Kalābari, Tāmolbari, Kahuātali and Nārāyaṇpur, situated in the Kamrup district. There are a few more satras in Nowgong and Goalpara districts also.

The tenets and practices followed in these satras are derived from the Vaiṣṇavism of Bengal. But in organisational aspects, they are almost identical with other satras of Assam. The mode of singing or chanting prayers and hymns follows that of the Gauḍiya school.

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[3] Nilakaṇṭha Das : *Dāmodara-carita*, verses, 284-85.

[4] Ramākānta Dvija : *Vanamālidevar Carita*, p. 102.

[5] S. C. Goswami : *Introducing Assam Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 20.

APPENDIX II

MONASTIC BUDDHISM AND SATRA VAIṢṆAVISM

Relying on an apparent resemblance between the *triratnas* of Buddhism under which monks were required to take shelter and the four *saraṇas* of Assam Vaiṣṇavism, and certain similarities between the Buddhist vihāra and the satra, it has been suggested by a few Assamese scholars that the satra system of Assam is based on Buddhist monasticism. According to S. C. Goswami "Vaiṣṇavism of Assam adds Godhead to the *triratnas* of Buddhism, a faith which made no definite statement about the Godhead and preached them as its four *śaráṇas*. Mr. K. R. Medhi writes : "There are grounds for supposing that Buddhism had once great sway in Assam. The monastic and congregational systems, the three precious objects (*saraṇas*), the image procession, the *pada-śilā*, the *āsana* and relics, the offering of lamps, oil and flowers etc. point to some similarities between Buddhism and Assam Vaiṣṇavism.[2]" Mr. K. L. Barua is also of the same opinion when he says "These satras came into existence after the demise of Śaṅkaradeva. They were really modelled on the Buddhist vihāras, ... The word used to denote initiation of a neophyte in the Assamese Vaiṣṇava tenets is *saraṇa*. We find the word *saraṇa* used in the initiation of a Buddhist, *Buddhaṁ Śaraṇam gacchāmi*."[3]

Against the above contentions, it may be said that Buddhism was at no time a flourishing religion in Kāmarūpa as to supply inspiration to Śaṅkaradeva and his followers. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-tsang did not notice any form of Buddhism in Kāmarūpa. Even Vajrayana which is said to have prevailed in Kāmarūpa approximately between the ninth and the twelfth centuries of the Christian era, was never a popular religion and it was propably practised as a secret or esoteric cult by a section only.[4] All the ancient Kāmarūpa Kings were followers of Brāhmaṇism and the inscriptions so far recovered do not testify to the existence of Buddhism in a large scale. Even admitting that Vajrayāna in its various tāntric forms

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[1] S. C. Goswami : *Introducing Assam Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 12.

[2] K. R. Medhi : *Assamese Grammar and origin of Assamese Language*, p. xxxviii.

[3] K. L. Barua : *An Early History of Kāmarūpa*, p. 317.

[4] B. K. Barua : *A Cultural History of Assam*, p. 162f ; K. L. Barua : *An Early History of Kāmarūpa*, p. 142f.

prevailed in Kāmarūpa, it is unlikely that Śaṅkaradeva and his followers whose aversion to Trantricism was so pronounced, did receive anything directly from Vajrayāna. Denunciation of so called *Baudhas* is most prominent in the writings all Vaiṣṇava saints.

As regards the use of the word *śaraṇa* to denote initiation of a neophyte in Assam Vaiṣṇavism, it may be said that the word is adopted from the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* which are held to be the most authoritative scriptures of the sect. Moreover, the word *śaraṇa* to denote initiation is used by Vallabhites and Rāmānujītes also. The necessity of taking shelter in *guru* (spiritual guide) *nāma* (names or attributes) *satsaṅga* (holy association) and in God have been recognised as indispensable conditions for the development of Bhakti by almost all the sects of medieval India. It is not an exclusive characteristic of the Vaiṣṇavism of Assam. The *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* highly speaks of the utility of surrendering oneself to the above principles. It cannot however be denied that Puranic Hinduism, particularly Vaiṣṇavism, owes a great deal to Buddhism and the existence of many points of resemblance between the two have been commented upon by competent scholars. But to link up Vaiṣṇavism of Assam and the satra institution of the sixteenth century directly with Monastic Buddhism, is to deny the intermediate stages and therefore it seems to be a far cry.

As regards image procession, relic worship and offering of light, it may be said that these practices are not exclusively confined to Buddhism and Assam Vaiṣṇavism. Not to speak of Indian sects, the relic worship is found in many other sects of the world including Roman Catholicism. The Pranāmīs, the Kabir-panthīs, the Dādu-panthīs and the Gorakṣa-panthīs, to mention a few of the Indian sects, worship thrones, sandals and foot-prints of celebrated Mohunts of their sampradāyas.[5] The image procession like *Ratha-yātrā* and *Snāna-yātrā* have been in existence in the temple of Jagannātha from early times. These characteristics might have been the legacy of Buddhism or Jainism, but they entered into the fold of Hinduism long before neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Assam came into existence. Therefore, it would be a hasty conclusion to state that Assamese Vaiṣṇavism derived the above characteristics directly from Buddhism.

As against the suggestion that the satra institution was modelled on the Buddhist vihāra, it may be said that Monastic Buddhism was practically extinct in India when the foundation of the satra was laid in the sixteenth century. Moreover, the term satra does not point to its Buddhist origin. No reference to any visit to a Buddhist monastery, if it existed at all, could be found in the list of places visited by Śaṅkaradeva and his followers during their holy sojourns throught India. Therefore, the direct influence of Monastic Buddhism on satra Vaiṣṇavism of Assam seems improbable.

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[5] J. N. Farquhar : *Outline of Religious literatures of India,* pp. 342, 347; Thoothi : *Vaiṣṇavas of Gujarata,* p. 336.

It will not be far from truth if we state that the satra institution probably owed its foundation to the matha system of Northern and Southern India, which received a great fillip after the time of Śaṅkarāchāryya who established four mathas at different outposts of India. After him teachers of various sects, like Rāmānuja, Maḍhva and Rāmānanda established their own mathas and the number thus grew into a legion. The satra institution as we find today is a product of an evolutionary process, but behind the formation of its nucleus inspiration supplied by the matha system could be inferred. During his first pilgrimage of twelve years' duration Śaṅkaradeva practically covered the whole of India and visited all the holy places and mathas of importance. During his second pilgrimage he is said to have visited the matha of Kabir.[6] But the subsequent growth of the institution after Śaṅkaradeva was a process of gradual development, a product of expediancy and need of time. No external influence seems probable in the later stage of its growth.

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[6] *Kathā-gurucarita*, p. 153 ; Rāmacaraṇa : *Śaṅkara-carita*, p. 251ff.

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APPENDIX III

DEMOCRACY IN SATRA VAIṢṆAVISM

The Vaiṣṇavite reformers of Assam and other parts of India asserted the dignity of human soul. No man was considered by reason of his birth and social rank unworthy or useless in the religious set-up of Vaiṣṇavism. It raised the Śūdras to a position of spiritual power and social importance, almost equal to that of the Brahmins. A democratic outlook permeates the entire teachings and practices of the Vaiṣṇava cult. On the one hand, God has been brought down from the metaphysical height to the reach of the ordinary people by endowing him with personality and making him subservient to the will of his devotees (*bhakatara vaśya*), on the other hand the status of human being, nay, of all creatures, has been elevated by insisting on the identity of God and soul. In a few passages of the *Kīrtana* as well as other Vaiṣṇava works, a devotee (*bhakata*) has been raised to a more exalted position than that of God and the latter according to the Vaiṣṇavite works cannot act arbitrarily against the wishes of his devotees. Like true democrats Vaiṣṇavas have given an honourable position to those who are even opposed to God. It has been asserted in the Vaiṣṇava scriptures that those who think God as enemy attain God sooner than others.[1]

The same democratic outlook could be noticed in the working of the satra institution and its practices in early stage of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism. In initiating disciples no discrimination was made between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, the high and the low. The fact that the Guruship was not reserved as the exclusive monopoly of the Brahmins and that the Śūdra classes, viz., the Kāyasthas and the Kalitās, were ungrudingly raised to the position of the headship of many a satra, bear eloquent testimony to the spirit of equality among the Vaiṣṇavas.

In the Vaiṣṇava reformers' desire to educate the masses, the same democratic attitude could be noticed. They translated Sanskrit scriptures into Assamese and thus rendered them comphehensible to all people, whereas the privilege of reading and interpreting them had hither to been the virtual monopoly of the Brahmins. The procedure of conducting congregational prayer where all devotees irrespective of their social position used to participate and receive equal treatment also speaks of the levelling influence of Vaiṣṇavism and the democratic zeal of the reformers.

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* Materials already incorporated in different chapters in different contexts have been re-arranged here to present a complete impression.

[1] Śaṅkaradeva : *Kīrtana*, section vi, vv. 281, 289.

When we cast our eyes upon the management of earlier satras founded by Mādhavadeva and others, we can clearly discern the democratic basis on which they were run. Unlike the satras of the later peroid, neither Mādhavadeva nor Dāmodaradeva considered the satras, over which they presided, as their personal property and the title *adhikāra* which convey the sense of ownership was never applied to them. The satra collectively belonged to the community of devotees and the reformers simply acted as their guides or leaders. They did not consider themselves any way superior to other devotees. The attitude of Mādhavadeva has been best illustrated in the following anecdotes narrated in *Kathā-Gurucarita.*[2a]

(i) Śrīrāma Ātā, the attendant-devotee to Mādhavadeva had to pass one night outside the satra campus with one of the fellow devotees of the satra. Next morning he hastened to the satra to serve his superior Mādhavadeva, leaving behind his companion. When Mādhavadeva came to know of it, he at once sent him back directing him to apologise to his companion. He further instructed Śrīrāma, not to pay over-attention to his (Mādhava) personal comfort by neglecting other devotees who were no way inferior to him.

(ii) The mother of the Koch king Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa greatly admired Mādhavadeva and his folowers and occasionally sent presents to them. One day, she sent several pairs of *dhoties* and *chadder* of unequal size and quality to Mādhavadeva and devotees making a certain distinction between the recepients. Mādhavadeva was given the best pair. He immediately returned the presents to the queen-mother for making uncalled for distinction between himself and his followers.

When Mādhavadeva left for Cooch-Behar, he handed over the management of the Barpeta satra to the community of devotees appointing Mathurādasa Ātā as the leader. The management of his satra at Cooch-Behar was similarly vested in the community which selected one Achyuta Guru as the leader after the death of Mādhavadeva. Dāmodaradeva on the eve of his death, having summoned all his principal disciples from different parts of Assam, formally nominated Bhaṭṭadeva as his successor with approval of all. Padma *alias* Badalā Ātā also left the management of the Kamalābārī satra under the collective authority of the celibate devotees nominating Śrīrāma as the head of the community.[2b] Thus we find that in the first stage of the satra history, when the system of hereditary succession was not introduced, the democratic method of chosing the best person as the leader of community prevailed. The ownership of the satra and the responsibility of managing its affairs rested with the assembly of devotees residing within the satra campus.

[2a] *Kathā-gurucarita*, pp. 501, 586.

[2b] *Kathā-gurucarita*, pp. 513, 598; Bezbarua : *Śaṅkaradeva-aru-Mādhavadeva*, p. 363f.

That the collective voice of community was powerful enough to check any arbitrary action of the leader, is borne out by a few instances noted in the medieval biographies of saints and the chronicles of satras. Two of them are noted below.

Mathurādāsa Ātā who succeded Mādhavadeva as the leader of the religious community of the Barpetā satra once incurred the displeasure of the community by acting against the sanction of the Vaiṣṇavite ideals. His fault was that he had tried to escape from being arrested for an alleged offence by bribing the officers of king Parīkshitanārāyaṇa. Inmates of the satra on coming to know of this, decided to depose him from the leadership. But a last-minute compromise through the intervention of Gopāla Ātā of Bhawānipura saved the situation.[3] A similar case of deposition and disowning of the leadership happened in the Bhelā satra after Mādhavadeva's death. Achyuta Guru, who was the head of the Bhelā satra after Mādhavadeva, was disowned by the devotees for his high-handed actions.[4] The system of electing the leader or the head by voting procedure is still current in the Barpetā and a few other satras of Kāmrūpa.

The conspicuous branch of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism with a pronounced democratic bias is the Kāla Saṁhati. Theoretically the Guru occupies an exalted position and is even ranked equally with God but in practice the relation between him and his disciples has been throughout its history friendly and intimate. The Dihiṅg and the Māyāmara satras admitted converts from non-Aryan tribes and placed their disciples on an elevated footing. Though these satras had caste Hindus in their fold, their disciples mainly consisted of Kachāris, Āhoms, Kaivartas, Brittiyāls, Chutiyās and Morāns. These castes, which are now denominated as backward, were freely admitted to the fold of these satras and they gradually imbibed refined and enlightened ways of living. In Assam the liberal policy of the Kāla Saṁhati satras endowed them with a sense of self-respect and individual value.

The Kāla Saṁhati satras literally translated into practice the Vaiṣṇavite teaching that a devoted cāṇḍāla is superior to a learned Brahmin without devotion. A Brahmin or a member of any of the higher castes does not get any special preference or privilege because of his birth. The head of a Kāla Saṁhati satra i.e. the Guru is required by tradition to salute with his knees bending, even a devotee of the so-called depressed classes, in return for the latter's salutation. But in three other Saṁhatis, particularly in the Brahma Samhati, the caste privileges have been retained.

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[3] *Gopāla-Ātā-carita*, p. 234f.

[4] *Ṭhākur-Ātār Carita*, p. 255f.

With the prevalence of the system of hereditary succession to the headship of the satras the importance of the community of devotees in the management of the satra affairs began to diminish. The hereditary heads virtually became the owner of their satras and the community of devotees shorn of its former power was relegated to an unimportant position. Henceforth they (heads) came to be known as *adhikāra.*

The influence of the Ahom royal court on the administrative system of the satras of Eastern Assam is another factor that contributed to the decay of democracy in satras. The Ahom administrative system with the king as the supreme head and assisted by a council of nobles (*ḍāṇgariyās*) and a host of officers of various grades owning allegiance directly to the king, seemed to have cast its reflection on the satra administration also. The *adhikāra* assisted by a council of elder devotees known as *sātmān-bhagiyā* formed the main administrative machinery under which devotees of second and third categories function. The paik system of the Ahom administration was also introduced in a few satras. The principal satras of Mājuli were favoured by their patron kings with several villages consisting of a few hundred paiks. Duties of these paiks were to serve their respective satras with manual labour and to supply the satras with necessary things. In each village, twelve paiks served under one *barā* and a hundred paiks served under one *saikiā* similar to those of the Ahom administration. According to the *Tuṅgkhuṅgiā Buranjī,* prince Gadādhara Siṁha, while he was moving from place to place in disguise, noticed in some satras, particularly in the Dakhiṇapāṭ satra, how they copied the royal court by conferring titles like *barā, śaikiā* and *hājarikā* on their devotees.[5] When he came to power he took stern actions to curb the power of the satras. The influence of the royal court helped to develop unnecessary formalities which stood as barriers between the Guru and the disciples.

But the satras of western Assam did not try to copy the secular administrative system either of the Ahoms or of the Koches. There are neither so many gradation of ecclesiastical officers nor over-laden formalities as in the satras of eastern Assam. These satras were far away from the courtly atmosphere of Sibsagar and Cooch-Behar. The eastern Koch kingdom, after Dharmanārāyaṇa (1615-1637 A.D.), shorn of its independence was practically reduced to a zamindary and therefore, it could not in any way influence satras situated in Kāmarūpa and Goalpara areas.

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[5] S. K. Bhuyan : *Tuṅgkhungiā Burañji,* p. 14.

In the working of the village *nāmaghar* the same democratic spirit operates. It has been noticed in the chap. vii, that the corporate life of an Assamese village moves centering round the village *nāmaghar*. It is constructed by the joint labour of the villagers. Every household is considered as an unit and therefore, each household is required to place the service of at least one member of the family in constructing and maintaining the *nāmaghar*. Every household must contribute proportionately to *nāmaghar* according to the number of its members in cash or kind. Those who are not in a position to contribute they are required to put additional labour in the cause of the *nāmaghar*. The daily religious functions held in the *nāmaghar* are performed on a co-operative basis. Works like the kindling of light, cleansing and sweeping of the floor, and arranging of necessary materials that are necessary for daily services, are done by each household by rotation. If the material condition of a householder is deplorable, he is generally exempted from the obligation of supplying materials for religious services.

The same cooperative principle holds good in the case of social functions. No discrimination is made between the rich and the poor in distributing roles in village dramatic performances where all the villagers contribute according to their capacity and aptitude to make the performance a success. The same tendency to treat all the villagers with an equal eye is noticed in community feasts and festivals. In settling up of village disputes and in trials of moral turpitude and social indiscipline, the head of each family is invited to the *nāmaghar* to take part in the proceedings. Before the trial is formally opened the complainant as well as the respondent must offer a nominal fee usually not exceeding one rupee, with a trayful of *tāmol-pāṇ* to the assembly of villagers. After the trial is over, these are distributed amongst the assembled members.

In the *Bihu* festivals, particularly in *Bahāg Bihu,* a member from each household should, as a custom, accompany the dancing and singing party which visits and entertains every household of the village and its neighbouring areas. The party is reverentially received by the householders with the offering .of hand-woven cloth, money and *tāmol-pāṇ* With the amount, thus realised, the party at the end of the festival buys a few bags of salt and distribute them amongst the members that accompanied the party. The village *nāmaghar,* a wing of the satra, has thus been serving as the centre of democratic activities of the villages.

APPENDIX IV

SOURCE MATERIALS: BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement produced a mass of literature consisting of dramas, kāvyas, songs, biographies and hymns. Some of these are translation and adaptations of the Purāṇic literature and others are original. Śaṅkaradeva and his chief disciple Mādhavadeva, not to speak of the others, were powerful writers and they harnessed their pen for the propagation of Vaiṣṇavite teachings. The importation of new ideas from other parts of India as from Śanskrit epics and Purāṇas brought about a renaissance in Assamese literature.

The important works which have embodied the tenets, teachings and trends of Vaiṣṇavism of Assam may be classified into two broad divisions, *viz.* (1) scriptural, i.e. those based on Sanskrit scriptures, and (2) non-scriptural, i.e. biographies and chronicles. The former class consists of two types of works :—(*a*) those based on episodes of Purāṇas and (*b*) devotional compilations without any story-element. In the following pages all those works that shed considerable light on Assam Vaiṣṇavism have been briefly discussed. Vaiṣṇavite dramas, kāvyas and songs have been left out of this discussion because they are not considered as authoritative works, and also, unnecessary for the study of the history of Assam Vaiṣṇavism.

1. (*a*) *Devotional works with stories :*

Bhāgavata : It is considered the supreme religious work. Laudatory verses in praise of this work are found in almost all the works of Assam Vaiṣṇavism. It has been styled as the sun of the Purānic literature and the essence of the Vedic scriptures. The entire *Bhāgavata* was translated into Assamese in the Vaiṣṇava period by different poets. Of the twelve Books of the *Bhāgavata,* Śaṅkaradeva alone translated no less than seven books including the most popular Book X (*Daśama skandha*). His Assamese version of the Book X, popularly known as *Daśama* is not only the most popular work but also held in the highest esteem. Important teachings of the sect have been appended to every chapter. All the twelve Books have been recently printed and published in one single volume by Harinārāyan Datta Barua of Nalbari, Kamrup.

Kīrtana : It is another important work of Śaṅkaradeva. As the name suggests it was composed for the use in prayer services. The book contains twentythree sections. They are mostly devotional stories summerised from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* with the exception of three sections which are based on chapters of the *Padma-purāṇa* and the *Brahmānaṇda-purāṇa.* Every chapter begins with a *ghoṣā* (burden, refrain) followed by narrative verses. "A work of mature years, it has poise, dignity and charm and with a supreme mastery of the language he (Śaṅkaradeva) has elucidated the various subtleties of his cult." It has several printed editions.

Śrīmadbhāgavadgītā : This is considered as important a work as the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and the idea of *Śaraṇa* (surrender) is said to have been derived from it. It has several Assamese versions of which the *Kathā-gītā* by Bhaṭṭadeva and *Padya-gītā* by Govinda Miśra of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively, are widely popular. The former was printed and published by the late Hem Chandra Goswami (1840 Śakābda) and the second has several popular editions.

Besides the above two major works, there are several minor works where ideals and teachings of Vaiṣṇavism have been discussed and explained in details through the medium of some episodes of the Purāṇas. *Nimi-Navasiddha-saṁvāda :* (discourse between Nimi and nine Siddhas) *Anāndi-Pātan* (accounts of creation) by Śaṅkaradeva and *Rājasūya-kāvya* by Mādhavadeva may be specially mentioned amongst so many minor works. Most of these have many popular printed editions.

1(b) *Devotional digests and compilations :*

Bhakti-ratnākara : It is a compilation of devotional tenets and teachings from various Sanskrit Purāṇas and devotional works. The following are the main scriptures from which verses have been quoted in support of various topics discussed in several chapters relating to Bhakti.

Bhagāvata-purāna, Bhāgavadgītā, Kūrma-purāna, Narasiṁha-purāṇa, Nāradīya-purāṇa, Viṣṇu-purāṇa, Bṛhannāradiya-purāna, Matsya-purāṇa, Vaiṣṇavānandalahari, Pāṇḍavīgītā, Prabodhacandrodaya, Viṣṇu-dharmottara, Yogasāra (Kṛiyayogasāra), *Śāntiśataka, Silhana, Sātvata-tantra* and a few others. Here Sanskrit ślokas, compiled from the *Bhāgavata* and other Purāṇas and Tantras having a Vaiṣṇavite bias, have been classified and arranged in chapters according to various topics connected with Bhakti.

The topics discussed in the *Bhakti-ratnākara are* : (i) service to Guru (*guru sevā*), (ii) glorification and praise of human life (*naradeha māhātmya*), (iii) eulogy and efficacy of holy association (*sādhu-saṅga-māhātmya*), (iv) characteristics and qualification of devotees (*Bhakta-lakṣana*), (v) determination of the nature of God (*Īśvara-nirṇaya*), (vi) merit of listening to God's names (*śravanamāhātmya*), (vii) difference between God and soul (*Jīva-Īśvara-bheda-māhātmya*), (viii) merit of singing God's names (*kīrtana-māhātmya*), (ix) merit of remembering God's names and forms (*smaraṇa-māhātmya*), (x) merit of worshipping and bowing to God's image (*arccana-vandana-māhātmya*) (xi) glorification of the path of devotion (*Bhakti-yoga-māhātmya*), (xii) characteristics of a best devotee (*uttama bhakta*), (xiii) characteristics of a middling devotee, (xiv) characteristics of an ordinary devotee (*Prākrita-bhakta*), (xv) salient features of *Uttamā-bhakti, Antaraṅgā-bhakti, Sapremā-bhakti,* and *Nirguṇā-bhakti,* (xvi) comparative value and praise of the three gunas (*guṇabheda māhātmya*) (xvii) devotees devoid of social codes and conducts (*ācāra-bhraṣṭa-bhakta*), (xviii) praise of the limbs of devotees, (xix) praise of the birth and deeds of devotees, (xx) fate of the enemies of devotees, (xxi) censure of the persons devoid of devotion, (xxii) censure of the birth and deeds of persons devoid of devotion (xxiii) censure of the limbs of persons devoid of devotion, (xiv) censure of the worldly pursuit (- - *pravṛtti-pathanindā*), (xxv) censure of the ritualistic expiation (*prayaścitta nindā*), (xxvi) censure of happiness associated with the *svarga* (heaven), (xxvii) eulogy of *vairāgya,* (xxviii) duties in the *Kali-yuga,* (xxix) eulogy of *Bhāratavarṣa* (xxx) means of escape from the clutches of illusion (*māyā*). The above topics have been discussed and elucidated with profuse quotations from different purāṇas and tantras.

Śaṅkaradeva compiled it before he came in possession of Viṣṇupuri's *Bhakti-ratnāvali.* It was compiled probably in the first half of the sixteenth century. An Assamese metrical version of this work was made a few years after his death by Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur the nephew of Mādhavadeva. The Assamese version is more popular on account of its easy intelligibility. It contains fortyone chapters on different topics. Two critical editions of the Assamese version have recently been printed and published. The edition by Mohan Chandra Mahanta, Satrādhikara of the Telpani Satra, Jorhat, has been referred to in this work.

Bhakti-ratnāvali : This work needs no introduction being the famous work of Viṣṇupuri. Biographies of the saint-reformer uniformly narrate an incident connected with the importation of the *Ratnāvali* into Assam. Kaṇṭhabhūṣana, a young Brahmin scholar, unable to defeat Śaṅkaradeva in a religious dispute went to Banaras to study *Vedānta* and *Bhāgavata* under one Brahmānanda. One day, a few ślokas of Book XI of the *Bhāgavata* appeared too difficult not only for the students but also for the teacher as well. Kaṇṭhabhūṣana quoted the lines of the Assamese version translated by Śaṅkaradeva. Brahmānanda highly pleased with the lucid rendering of the verses enquired of him about the translator. When he came to know from Kaṇṭhabhūṣana about Śaṅkaradeva, he sent back Kaṇṭhabhūṣana with a copy of the *Ratnāvalī,* with the commentary *Kāntimālā,* to Śaṅkaradeva explaining that the copy was left by his Guru Viṣṇupuri to be delivered to the saint of Assam. On receiving it Śaṅkaradeva asked Mādhavadeva to translate it into Assamese and the the latter accordingly translated it into lucid Assamese verses. The Assamese verson contains thirteen chapters embodying teachings and tenets of the Bhakti cult in general and the elements of Bhakti in details. It was translated between 1550-1568. There are several printed editions of this work.

Nāma-ghoṣā: It is undoubtably the *magnum opus* of Mādhavadeva. It consists of one thousand stanzas of psalms for recitation and prayer, of which about seven hundred stanzas are translations from numerous Sanskrit texts and the rest are his own compositions. It was composed during the last few years of his life and that is why Dr. B. K. Kakati, the eminent scholar and critic of Assam has called it the swan-song of Mādhavadeva. Like *Bhakti-ratnākara* or *Ratnāvali,* it has not classified various modes and elements of Bhakti, but is entirely devoted to the glorification of the *nāma-dharma.* It begins with a devotional prayer to the ten incarnation of God and narrates in details the merit of reciting the name of Hari. It contains among others, the interpretation of the various names and attributes of Nārāyaṇa and theological elucidations of the cult of devotion and finally establishes its superiority. Its profundity of thought, unity of outlook and music of expression make it a precious religions text in Assamese literature. It has several popular printed editions.

Bhakti-viveka: It is a Sanskrit compilation of *Bhakti-ratnākara* type. The compiler and annotator is Bhaṭṭadeva, the prose translator of the *Bhāgavata* and the *Gītā.* The compitation was finished in 1621 A.D. (1543 *Śakābda*). The following are the scriptures from which verses have been quoted in support of different aspects of Bhakti.

(a) Purāṇas: *Bhāgavata, Laghubhāgavata, Ādi, Viṣṇu, Bṛhat-Viṣṇudharmottara, Garuḍa, Agni, Prabhāsa* (Skanda), *Vārāha, Kūrma, Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa.*

(b) Tantras and Samhitas: *Sātvata-tantra, Vaśiṣṭha-saṁhita, Viṣṇu-yāmala, Viṣṇu-rahasya, Agastya-saṁhitā, Pātanjala-saṁhitā, Baudhāyana-saṁhitā, Varāha-rahasya, Bṛhat-Viṣṇu-saṁhitā, Kaumāra-tantra, Vaiśvānara-saṁhitā, Jaimini-saṁhitā, Kātyāyana-saṁhitā, Bṛhaspati-saṁhitā, Hayaśirṣa-pāñcarātra,* and *Nāradīya-saṁhitā.*

(c) Śrutis and Smṛities: *Śvetāśvatara, Chāndogya, Kāṭhaka, Kaṭha, Īśāvācya, Muṇḍaka, Manu-smṛti* and *Cyavana Smṛti.*

(d) Miscellaneous : *Gītā, Hayaśirṣatāpanīya, Itihāsottama* etc.

It contains fifteen chapters on different aspects of Bhakti with a special emphasis on *śaraṇa.* The following topics have been discussed in different chapters : (i) determination of the place where Bhakti resides and flourishes (*Bhakti-sthāna-nirṇaya*), (ii) qualities of a guru and disciples (*guru-śiṣya-nirṇaya*), (iii) definition and glorification of śaraṇa (*śaraṇa-nirṇaya*), (iv) glorification and efficacy of nāma (*nāma-māhātmya*), (v) glorification and efficacy of devotion to Bhagavan-Hari (*Hari-bhakti-māhātmya*) (vi) merit of holy association (*sat-saṅga māhātmya*), (vii) general discussion about the nine elements of Bhakti, (viii) exposition and eulogy of the *śravaṇa,* (ix) exposition and eulogy of the *kīrtana,* (x) exposition and eulogy of the *śmaraṇa,* (xi) definition and exposition of the *arccaṅa,* (xii) definition and eulogy of the *Pada-sevana,* (xiii) merit of worship (*pūjā mahatmya*), (xiv) definition and exposition of the *dāsya,* (xv) proof of the reality of the form of God (*Bhagavanmūrteḥ satyatvam*).

Of nine modes of serving God, the work discusses only seven, the last two, viz. *sakhya* and *ātma-nivedana* being left out of the discussion, in as much as these modes of serving God do not accord well with the mode of servitude (*dāsyabhāva*) enjoined by Assamese Vaiṣṇavas. The work has recently been edited by Prof. L. N. Chatterjee and published (1951) by Harinarayan Datta Barua, Nalbari, Kamrup.

Sātvata-tantra: It is one of the important Vaiṣṇava scriptures. It was rendered into Assamese in the seventeenth century. Of the two Assamese versions one is metrical and the other is in prose. Both the translators have referred to Dāmodaradeva. The metrical version by one Bhāgavata Bhattācharyya is more lucid and popular. Śaṅkaradeva in his *Bhakti-ranākara* and Bhaṭṭadeva in his *Bhakti-viveka* have quoted several verses from the original Sanskrit version. The metrical version was printed and published in 1942 by the Assamese Literary Association (*Assam Sāhitya Sabhā*).

Śaraṇa-saṁgraha: It is a Sanskrit devotional compendium containing seven chapters. The compiler is one Śukadeva. The work deals with various elements of Bhakti and establishes its superiority by citing texts from various purāṇas and tantras. The sub-sects of Dāmodaradeva and Harideva consider it as an authoritative work. The initiation ceremony in satras of Brahma Śaṁhati is conducted according to its directions.

Besides the above works there are a few more devotional works of the same nature. Special mention may be made of *Ghosā-ratna* by Gopāla Miśra, a disciple of Dāmodaradeva, *Bhakti-pradīpa* by Śaṅkaradeva and *Nāma-mālikā* by Mādhavadeva. The first one belongs to the category of the *Nāma-ghosā* of Mādhavadeva. But though brief, the number of topics it treats is larger than those of *Nama-ghosā.* The work is more popular amongst the Vaiṣṇavas of the Dāmodarī sub-sect. It has two printed editions (1914, 1937). *Bhakti-Pradīpa,* though comes from the pen of Śaṅkaradeva, is not, however considered as an authoritative work. Besides two or three popular editions, there is one critical edition by Prof. M. Neog, 1946. The *Nāma-mālikā* was translated by Mādhavadeva from the original Sanskrit version compiled by Puruṣottama Gajapati, king of Orissa. It discusses the efficacy and the superiority of the *nāma-dharma.*

2. *Biographical works.*

Sankaracarita: It is supposed to be the earliest biography of Śaṅkaradeva. The biographer of this work is supposed to be Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur, the nephew of Mādhavadeva, who spent most of his life with his maternal uncle. The work is modelled on the *Daśama-skandha* (Book X of the *Bhāgavata*) and treats Śaṅkaradeva as an incarnated being and thus endows him with marvellous and miraculous powers. All the phases of Śaṅkaradeva's life have been narrated in minute details. But it is doubtful whether Rāmacaraṇa, the nephew of Mādhavadeva really wrote it, for, his son Daityāri Ṭhākur the most trustworthy biographer, categorically denies the existence of any model before him when he started his work. If his father had really wrote a biography he must have surely known it. Moreover Rāmacaraṇa completely deifies Śaṅkaradeva endowing him with supernatural powers. This act of deification suggests that the work must have been written after a lapse of considerable times after the death of Śaṅkaradeva. The published work consists of seven parts of which the sixth part is definitely a modern work as its language betrays it to be so. The other parts are fairly old. It begins with an account of Śaṅkaradeva's ancestry and practically ends with his death. Whether it is the work of the nephew of Mādhavadeva or not, the informations supplied by it (excepting those incorporated in the sixth part) are on the whole reliable as they tally with other biographies.

Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadevarcarita: Daityāri Ṭhākur, son of Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur, is the author of this work. The work was written in the first half of the seventeenth century. Caturbhuja Ṭhākur, one of the two grandsons of Śaṅkaradeva, who died within the first half of the seventeenth century was alive when Daityāri finished this work. R. M. Nath, one of the modern editors of the work has assigned 1620 A.D. as the date of its composition. He has relied mainly on the informations supplied by the biography of Kanakalatā, wife of Caturbhuja Ṭhākur. Daityāri briefly describes the life of Śaṅkaradeva but lays more emphasis on and gives detailed accounts of the life of Mādhavadeva. The biography begins with the coming of Candibara, the great grandfather of Śaṅkaradeva, to Assam from Kanauj and ends with the death Mādhavadeva. It gives definite dates of the death of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva in the concluding chapter. The accounts of this work are more reliable on account of the fact that supernatural elements and miracles are lesser than those of later biographies. Moreover, Datyāri compiles his informations from his father Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur and Govinda Ātai who were direct disciples of Mādhavadeva and who had the opportunity of seeing Śaṅkaradeva with their own eyes. It has two published editions; the earlier one is by Harivilash Gupta (1900) and the recent one (1948) is by Rajmohan Nath. The latter edition has been referred to in body of this work.

SrīŚaṅkaradeva: The third early biography of Śaṅkaradeva is by Bhūṣana Dvija. It is the briefest of the important biographies of Śaṅkaradeva and was most probably written in the second quarter of the seventeenth century. Biographer Bhūṣana Dvija was a contemporary of Puruṣottama and Chaturbhuja Ṭhākur, who lived and preached in the first half of the seventeenth century. The accounts of this biography, though brief and devoid of supernatural elements, are almost indentical with those of the *Śaṅkaracarita* supposed to be written by Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur. It was first published by D. Barkakati, Jorhat, 1925.

Guru-carita: It is a work of the later part of the seventeenth century. The biographer is Rāmānanda, son of Śrīrām Ātā of the Āhātaguri satra was a prominent disciple of Gopāla Ātā of Bhawānipur. The work deals with the life and activities of Śaṅkaradeva. Rāmānanda and Daityāri Ṭhākur agree in holding that Śaṅkaradeva received a copy of the *Bhagavata* from Jagadiśa Miśra (according Rāmānanda, his name is Jagannātha) while he was at Gāṅgmau and seriously engaged himself to religious pursuits after this event. Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur, Bhūṣana Dvija and others are unanimous in holding that Jagadiśa Miśra met Śaṅkaradeva at Barḍowā. The *Gurucarita* was first printed and published about sixty years back by the Late Harivilash Gupta, Tezpur. But the last part of the printed work is a mere reproduction of *Śaṅkaracarita* by Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur.

Kathā-gurucarita: It is the most voluminous of all the biographies. It is written in an inimitable rhythmic prose. It not only deals elaborately with all the incidents and activities of the life of Śaṅkaradeva but treats with equal minuteness the accounts of the lives of Mādhavadeva, Gopāla Ātā, Badalā Ātā, Harihara Ātā and all other contemporary Vaiṣṇava saints of the period. Though many of its accounts are highly exaggerated and contains supernatural details, yet it contains a vast mass of informations regarding religious activities, proselytizing methods, tenets, practices, customs and manners of the Vaiṣṇavas of medieval times. Dates of birth and death of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva have been given and also the years they spent at different places. From the genealogical lists of Gurus enumerated in the work, as well as from other internal evidences it may be concluded that the work was actually written down in the eighteenth century. It has been rencently (1951) edited by U. C. Lekharu and published by Harinārāyan Datta Barua.

Gurulīlā: Written by Rāmraya Dvija, this biography narrates the life and activities of Dāmodaradeva and his disciples. The biographer was the disciple of Arjunadeva, a prominent disciple of Dāmodaradeva. This seems to be the earliest biographical work dealing with life of Dāmodaradeva. It was finished during the reign of king Chandranārāyana of Cooch-Behar who ruled from 1640-1660 A.D. The work depicts Dāmodaradeva as the disciple of Caitanya, though the relationship with Śaṅkaradeva has not been denied. The work begins with a discription of the ancestry of Dāmodaradeva and ends wnth the death of Bhaṭṭadeva. The utility of the work in properly understanding the sub-sect cannot be denied. It has been edited and published in 1869 (*Śakābda*) by Sarat Chandra Goswami, Patbausi, Kamrup.

Dāmodara-carita: Biographer Nīlakaṇṭha Das according to the late S. C. Goswami, belonged to the first half of the eighteenth century. Nīlakaṇṭha, like Rāmarāya, ascribes the guruship of Dāmodaradeva to Caitanya. The accounts of this work are not exhaustive as the *Gurulīlā* of Rāmrāya, but it is more important and informative as regards the organisational activities of Dāmodaradeva. To know the view-points of Dāmodaradeva and his sub-sect, these two biographies of Dāmodaradeva by Rāmrāya and Nīlakaṇṭha, are indispensable. Nilakaṇṭha's work was edited by the Late S. C. Goswami under the auspices of the *Assam Sāhitya Sabhā* in 1927.

Vaṁśīgopāladevar Caritra: To follow the progress of Vaiṣṇavism in eastern Assam started by Vaṁśigopāladeva, this biography by Ramānanda Dvija is indispensable. It not only gives a graphic account of the life of Vaṁśigopāladeva, but throws much light upon the religious and social conditions of the eastern part of Assam during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the Christian era. It begins with an account of the ancestry of Vaṁśigopāladeva, his life and religious activities through untold sufferings at the hands of the hostile Ahom monarch and ends with the foundation of the four royal satras (Āuniāti, Dakhiṇapāt, Garamūr and Kuruwābāhi) under the patronage of Jayadhvaja Siṁha. The work is free from sectarian bias generally found in other biographies of the period. Ramānanda, the biographer was the disciple of Vaṁśigopaladeva, as such, his accounts are bound to be highly authentic. Prof. M. Neog has recently (1951) edited and published this work.

Vanamālīdevar Caritra: Vanamālideva, a disciple of Vaṁśigopāladeva was the founder of the Dakshinapat Satra. He was the spiritual preceptor of three Ahom monarchs viz., Jayadhvaja Siṁha, Cakradhvaja Siṁha and Ratnadhvaja Siṁha (1648-1663, 1663-1669, 1679-1681). He was not only a prominent personality in paving the way for the spread of Vaiṣṇavism in Eastern Assam but he was also responsible for initiating the contact with the royal court which subsequently influenced the satras so much. Biographer Ramākānta was the disciple of Vanamālīdeva and a contemporary of Rāmadeva, the successor of Vanamālīdeva. Ramākānta's narratives, may be taken as contemporary evidences of the Vaiṣṇava faith and movement of the seventeenth century. A critical edition of the work was published in 1930 under the auspices of the *Assam Sāhitya Sabhā*, Jorhat.

Gopāla-Ātār Carita: Gopāladeva, better known as Bhawānipuriyā Gopāla Ātā, is the founder of the Kāla samhati. He was one of the principal disciples of Mādhavdeva and a section of Vaiṣṇavas acclaim him as the successor of Mādhavdeva to the pontifical office. There are four mediaeval biographies of Gopāla Ātā written by Rāmānanda, Purnānanda, Harivallabha and Rāmadasa. The printed one published by Tirthanath Goswami of Dhalar satra, is a compilation from the above biographies. The accounts bear the stamp of the language of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and it is known that Ramānanda and Purnānanda whose accounts supply the three fourth of materials of the printed edition belonged either to the later half of the seventeenth century, or the first half of the eighteenth century. Ramānanda was the son of Śrīrāma Ātā, a prominent disciple of Gopāla Ātā, and Purnānanda was the grandson of Rāmacandra, another prominent disciple of the same saint. Gopāla Ātā's date is definitely known to be 1541-1611 A.D. The printed edition not only treats Gopāla Ātā's life in details, but gives short accounts of lives and activities of his principal twelve disciples.

Other important works written in 17th and 18th centuries of the Christian era are briefly noted below.

Santa Sampradā (18th century) by Govinda Dāsa is an informative work. Govinda Dāsa was a disciple of Vanamālīdeva. His work gives a rapid survey of the Vaiṣṇava movement with brief accounts of proselytisers and satras established by them. *Anantarāya-carita* (18th century) by Bhadracāru Dāsa, *Ṭhākur-carita* (18th century) by Vidyānanda Ojā and *Guru-vaṁśāvali* by Aniruddha Dāsa are valuable for informations about the leading personalities of the Puruṣa saṁhati. *Māyāmara Satrar-Vaṁśāvalī* (19th century) or the chronology of Māyāmarā Gosains by Cidānanda Goswāmi, *Dihiṅg Satrar Vaṁśāvalī* by Dutirām Hāzarikā, *Rāmgopāla-carita* (18th century) by Jaynārāyaṇa, supply considerable informations about the history of Māyāmarā, Dihiṅg and Āhātaguri satras of the Kāla Saṁhati. All these works supply copious informations on tenets and practices of different sects of Assam. Besides these, *Dāmodara-carita* by Kṛṣṇa Miśra and *Harīdeva-carita* by Baṇesvara and Divākara Dvija are useful works for a proper appreciation of the contribution and activities of the two saints. But these are probably the works of the eighteenth century and therefore cannot be as reliable as earlier biographies. Excepting *Māyāmarā Satrar Vaṁśāvalī* published by Hridayānanda Goswāmi in 1931, and *Harideva-carita*, other works noted above have not yet been published and they are being preserved in manuscript form in the library of the Historical and Antiquarian Department, Gauhati.

The most important work of the ninteenth century is *Burañji-vivekaratna* by Maṇirām Barbhāṇḍār Barua. It is a voluminous work containing elaborate narratives on religious, political and social conditions of Assam during the last days of the Ahom rule and of the beginning of the British rule. Maṇirām was the towering personality of the first half of the nineteenth century and was intimately connected with the Ahom royal court as well as with the religious institutions of his times. He was hanged by neck by the British authority for his alleged complicity in the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. His work furnishes details of the Māyāmarīyā insurrection as well as the religious systems and institutions of Assam of his times.

The work also gives details of some important rites and ceremonies observed in leading satras of different śaṁhatis. His descriptions of the Kāla Saṁhati, specially of the Māyāmarā sect, should not be accepted without some discount. Being a man of the royal court he painted the sect in an unfavourable light with a prejudiced mind. The manuscript of the work has been preserved in the library of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Gauhati.

Of the modern works, L. N. Bezbarua's two works viz., *Śaṅkaradeva* (1911) and *Śriśaṅkaradeva āru Śrimādhavadeva* (1914) deserve mention. But these two, specially the latter, are not written with a critical mind and therefore make no discrimination between the supernatural and the real, the historical and the legendary. The recent biography of Śankaradeva (1949) by M. Neog, tries to give a critical appreciation of the saint's life and activities. But these books are of little use for the study of the growth and development of the satra institution.

APPENDIX V

LIST OF SATRAS

A list of satras affiliated to different Saṁhatis has been given in the following pages. Though the list cannot claim to be an exhaustive one, yet all the available sources of information have been tapped to make it as exhaustive as possible. The main source of information is the *District Gazetteers of Assam,* 1905, where two hundred and enghty satras have been enlisted. But the names of founders and dates of foundation have not been given in the said list. I have incorporated three hundred and eighty satras with the names of founders and approximate period of their foundation. In finding out the names of founders, *Burañjī-vivekaratna* (19th century) by Maṇirām Barbhaṇḍār Barua, *Santa-sampradā* (18th century) by Govinda Dāsa, *Eṭakā Mahantar Jhunā* (18th century) by Bibhunatha and *Bāhi,* vol. I, part ii (1912) were of great help to me. My personal correspondence with several satras and accounts submitted by them in response to a set of queries published in the Assamese Daily *Natun Asamiyā* on 8.10.50., not only enabled me to verify the informations received from the above works but also helped me to supplement the list. Recently published *Pavitra Asam* has further helped me to verify and modify the list.

In ascertaining the approximate dates of foundation the following matters have been taken into consideration, (i) contemporary historical evidence,, (ii) genealogical tables (iii) circumstantial evidences.

I have arranged the satras in alphabetical order under the four traditional groups, viz., (A) Brahma Saṁhati, (B) Kāla Saṁhati, (C) Puruṣa Saṁhati, and (D) Nikā Saṁhati. Principal satras of each group have been marked with asterisks. Almost all the satras of the Brahma Saṁhati are presided over by Brahmins. But in the other three Saṁhatis the number of Brahmins and non-Brahmin heads is roughly of equal proportion. Satras marked by (H), and (C) belong to the Haridevi and the Caitanya sect.

The list is given in the following pages :

(A) BRAHMA SAMHATI

Name of Satra.	Founder	Time of foundation.	Location.
*Ādhār	Yadumaṇideva	1600—1625	Sibsagar
Agnisalā	Nārāyaṇa Bāpu	— — —	Kamrup
Allibārī(C)	Ramdeva	1650—1675	Kamrup
Amrangā	Santadeva	1600—1625	Kamrup
*Āuniāti	Nirañjanadeva	1654 A.D.	Sibsagar.
Auwāguri	A disciple of Vaṁśigopāladeva	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Bagunibāri	Haridasa	1650—1675	Kamrup
*Bahari(H)	Harideva	1560—1580	Hamrup
*Bainākuchi(H)	Jagannāthdeva	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Bainārā(H)	— — —	— — —	Darrang.
Bāli(H)	Ācharyadeva	1715—1740	Kamrup.
Bālipariyā	Sarvajaya Bāpu	1650—1675	Sibasagar.
Bālipārā	Vanamālideva	1650—1675	Darrang.
Bāmundi	Haribara	1600—1650	Kamrup.
Batargāyā	Paramānanda & Caturbhuja.	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Bejkuchi(H)	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
Belguri	— — —	— — —	Sibsagar.
Betbāri	Manohara Kayastha	1600—1650	Kamrup.
Bhalukāguri	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
Bhagaribāri	Santadeva	1625—1675	Kamrup.
Bihāmpura	Santadeva	1625—1675	Kamrup & Sibsagar.
Biringā-guri			Kamrup.
Brahmachārī	Viśvambhara Bāpu	1750—1800	Nowgong.
Cakalā	Mohana Bāpu	1650—1675	Darrang & Sibsagar.
Camārkuchi	Bhagavanadeva		Kamrup.
*Cāmeri	Kṛṣṇadeva	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Cakravartythān	Bāpu Bhārati	1675—1700	Kamrup.
Cāriṇgīyā	A disciple of Vaṃśigopāladeva	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Catrapura	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
Cikārpura	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
Cinātali	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
Cintāmaṇi	Cintāmanideva	1644 A.D.	Kamrup.
*Daksinapat	Vanamālideva	1653 A.D.	Sibsagar.
Dawāguri	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.

Name of Satra.	Founder.	Time of foundation	Location.
Dhāpkaṭā	A disciple of Vaṁśigopāladeva.	1625—1650	Sibasagar.
Diciyāl(C)	Kṛṣṇacarana	1625—1650	Sibasagr.
Deberāpār	Vaṁśigopāladeva	1600—1625	N. Lakhimpur.
Dārakiyāl	Kāmdeu Bāpu	1625—1650	— — —
Daiparā (c)	— — —	— — —	Nowgong.
Dhakuākhanā	Arjuna Deuri	1,625—1650	N. Lakhimpur.
Dhakuābāri	Riṣabha Bāpu	— — —	Kamrup.
*Diphalu	Kṛsnacandra	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Durāmarā	Mādhavendra	1600—1625	Sibsagar.
*Garamur	Jayaharideva	1715—1744	Sibasagar.
Garemārā	Santadeva	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Garpukhurīyā	Hari Bāpu	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Gaurāṅga	Gaurāṅga Bāpu	1625—1660	Ssbsagar
Ghāgariyāl	— — —	— — —	Kamrup
Ghārmarā	A son of yadumaṇi of Adhār Satra	1650—1675	Sibsagar Lakhipur
Ghuriyā- gāyā	Hari Bāpu	1625—1650	Sibsagar
Gomorā	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
*Govindapur	Bhagavāndeva	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Govindamiśra	— — —	— — —	Nowgong
Guimāri	Kṛsnagiri	1700—1750	Kamrup.
Guiyā	Garuḍadhvaja	1650—1700	Kamrup.
Guwābāri		— — —	Kamrup.
Hāladhibārī(H)	Kapiladeva	— — —	Kamrup.
Hāligāon	— — —	1700—1750	Kamrup.
Harimisra	— — —	— — —	Nowgong.
Haripur(H)	— — —	1700—1750	Kamrup-
		— — —	Darrang.
*Jāgārā	Haricaraṇadeva	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Jakhalābandhā	Dāmodara Bāpu	1650—1675	Nowgong.
Jālkuriyā	A disciple of Vaṁśigopāladeva	1625—1650 — — —	Sibsagar.
Jatkarā	Vanamālideva	1650—1700	Sibsagar.
Jayantipur			Kamrup.
Kāhikuchi	Vaṁśigopāladeva	1600—1625	N. Lakhimpur.
Kaharāthān	Jayarāma	— — —	Kamrup.
Kāhuātali(C)		— — —	Kamrup.
*Kaihāti	Keśava Bāpu	1650—1700	Kamrup.
Kaihāti(H)		1675—1700	Kamrup.
Kākayāl	Rāmacaraṇa Bāpu	1625—1650	
Kakilā(Dhemaji)	Haricaraṇa	1625—1650	Lakhimpur.
Kalbāri	Śrīrāma Bāpu	1625—1650	Darrang.
Kaliyābar	Kṛṣṇa Śravanī	1625—1650	Nowgong.

Name of Satra.	Founder.	Time of foundation.	Location.
Kalābāri(C)		1700—1750	Darrang.
Kāmdewāl	Kāmdeu Bāpu	1625—1650	Nowgong Darrang.
Karāikhowā	Kalki Bāpu	1625—1650	
Karigāon	Śrīdhara Bhāgati	1625—1650	Darrang.
Kathālmūri	Vasudeva	1600—1650	Goalpara.
Kāwaimāri	Gopala Bāpu	1650—1675	Kamrup.
Keōṭkuchi	Mukundadeva	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Khanā(H)			Kamrup.
Khaṭarā	Vāsudeva	1625—1650	Kamrup-Darrang.
Kharaṅgī	Kṛṣṇānanda	1625—1650	Nowgong.
*Khudiyā	Gopala Miśra	1575—1600	Kamrup.
Kulbil(H)			Kamrup.
*Kuruwābāhī	Vaṁśīgopāladeva	1600—1625	Sibsagar-Nowgong.
Lakhīpur	Paramānanda	— — —	Kamrup.
*Loca	Arjunadeva	1600—1650	Kamrup.
Madhumiśra	Madhu Miśradeva	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Manpur	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
*Māhārā	Jagadānanda	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Mājdiā Satra	Vanamālideva	1650—1675	Kamrup.
Maniyari	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
*Māneri(H)	Harideva	1560—1580	Kamrup.
Micir Satra	Hari Miśra	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Na-Satra	Manohara Kāyastha	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Namāti(I)	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
Namāti(H)	Mukundadeva	— — —	Kamrup.
Na-Cāparī	Arjundeva	1650—1700	Kamrup.
Nagdipur	A disciple of Dāmodaradeva		Kamrup.
Nalbāri	Madhava Kandali	— — —	Kamrup.
Nahirā	Viśṇudeva	1700—1725	Kamrup.
Naptipārā(H)	Nārāyaṇadeva	1650—1700	Kamrup.
Nārāyaṇpur(C)	Rāmacandra	1650—1700	Kamrup.
Nārāṅgāpur		— — —	Kamrup.
Nogorā		— — —	Kamrup.
Pahumārā		— — —	Sibsagar.
Palāśbāri	Manpur Gosain	— — —	Kamrup.
Pomarā	Krisnadeva	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Palowā	Manohar Kāyastha	1600—1625	Kamrup.
*Pāṭbāusi	Dāmodaradeva	1560—1590	Kamrup.
Parenā(H)	Jagannāthadeva	1580—1600	Kamrup.
Patiyari	Purnānandadeva	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Phulguri	Manoharadeva	1600—1650	Goalpara
*Phutukācāpari		1675—1700	Sibsagar.
Porolābāri	Janārddana Bāpu	1650—1700	Kamrup.

Name of Satra.	Founder.	Time of foundation.	Location.
Rajāpukhuri	Baladeva	1625—1650	Kamrup.
Rāmrāi-kuthi		1600—1650	Kamrup
Ratanpur	Purnānanda	1675—1725	Sibsagar.
Roṣpur	Mādhava	— — —	Kamrup.
Sanatpur		— — —	Kamrup.
Śalakhguri		— — —	Kamrup.
*Sāudkuchi	Sarvānanda	1650—1700	Sibsagar.
Śilpotā	Jayharideva	— — —	Kamrup.
Śildubhi	Śiromaṇideva	— — —	Nowgong Kamrup.
Śilatīyā	— — —	1650—1700	Kamrup.
Śimalguri	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
Śiyālmāri	A disciple of Baladeva	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Śravani	Kṛṣṇacarana	1650—1675	Nowgong.
Sravani Satra	Gatikānta	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Śubha(H)	Nārāyaṇdeva	1600—1650	Kamrup.
*Śrīhāṭi	Hari Bāpu	1600—1650	Kamrup.
Śrijangrām	Raghunatha	1575—1600	Goalpara.
Tāmolbāri(I)	Laksmana & Karuṇā	1625—1650	Lakhimpur.
Tāmolbārī (C)	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
Tāntipārā	Vidura Bāpu	1650—1700	Kamrup.
Teokiyāl	A disciple of Vaṃṣīgopāladeva.	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Tipamiyā	— — —	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Ulābari	Nārada Bāpu	1650—1675	Kamrup.
Ulubārī	Balarāma	1650—1700	Sibsagar.
Uzanīyāl	Kānu Bāpu	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
*Vyāhkuchi	Bhattadeva	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Viṣṇupur	A disciple of Vaṃṣīgopāla	1650—1700	Sibsagar.
Viṣṇupur			Kamrup.

(B) KALA SAMHATI

Name of Satra.	Founder.	Time of foundation.	Location.
Abhaypur	Dāmodara Ātai	1675—1700	Sibsagar.
*Āhātaguri	Śrīrāma Bāpu	1625—1650	Sibsagar Nowgong.
Āmguri	Mādhavānanda	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Āmtalā		1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Bagaritaliyā	Rangācaraṇa	1775—1800	Lakhimpur.
Bāghmarā	Bar-Guru	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Balami	Vijayānanda	1675—1700	Sibsagar.
*Bāhbārī	Baryadumaṇi	1600—1625	Sibsagar & Nowgong.
Bāreghar	Śrīrāma	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Bārhaipukhuri	— — —	— — —	Sibsagar.
Bhātmuāl	A disciple of Śrīrāma of Āhataguri.	1650—1675	Nowgong.

Name of Satra.	Founder.	Time of foundation	Location.
*Bhawānipur	Gopāla Ātā	1595—1620	Kamrup.
Bhogpur	Murāri Ātai	1675—1700	Sibsagar.
Bholāguri	Rāmgovinda	1675—1700	Nowgong.
Budbāri	Vijayānanda	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Cakalā	Nārāyaṇa Ātai	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Calihā	Sudarśana	1700—1750	Do
*Carāibāhi	Murāri Bāpu	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Caripotā	Kehō Ātā	1650—1700	Nowgong.
*Cecā	Ramāi Ātai	1650—1675	Sibsagar & Darrang Nowgong.
Ciyā-atiyā	A disciple of Saru-Yadumaṇi	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Dabāmarā	A descendant of Saru-Yadumaṇi	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Dahghariyā	Nārāyana Ātai	1625—1650	Nowgong Sibasagar.
Dāngdharīyā	A descendant of Saru-Yadumaṇi	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
*Daukācāpari	Jādavānanda	1650—1700	Nowgong
Deopānī	A descendant of Saru-Yadumani	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Dhalar	Giridhara	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Dhāpkaṭā	A disciple of Śrirāma of Āhātguri.	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Dhuāpaṅgīyā	A disciple of Śrīrama of Āhatguri Satra.	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Dhopābar	Svarupānanda	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Diburu	Sadānanda	1700—1750	Lakhimpur
*Dihing	Sanātanadeva	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
*Dinjay (Māyāmara)	Aniruddhadeva	1600—1625	Lakimpur.
*Gajalā	Saru-Yadumaṇi	1625—1650	Sibsagar. Nowgong.
Gamiri	A disciple of Rāmacandra of Ikarājān Satra.	1650—1675	Darrang.
Garparā	Harimayadeva	1807	Lakhimpur.
Gatiarā	A disciple of Rāmacandra of Ikarājan Satra.	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Godhāmarā	A disciple of Śrirāma Ātā	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Hābuṅg	Paramānanda	1625—1650	N. Lahkimpur.
Hāladhiāti	Nārāyaṇa	1625—1650	Sibsagar, Nowgong
*Hemārbarī	Rāmānanda	1650—1709	Sibsagar & Nowgong.

Name of Satra.	Founder.	Time of foundation.	Location.
*Ikarājān	Rāmacandra	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Jakāi	Ramākanta	1725—1750	Sibsagar.
Jariguri	A descendant of Saru-Yadumaṇi	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Jawārdi	Gopāla Ātā	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Jurākaṭā	Kānāi Ātai	1650—1700	Sibsagar.
Kalākatā	Daivakīnandana	1650—1700	Nowgong.
*Kāljhār	Gopāla Ātā	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Kāmsapār	Aniruddha	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Karatipār	Rāmānanda	1650—1675	Sibsagar Darrang.
Kardaiguri	Rāma-Kānāi	1725—1750	Sibsagar.
Khairāmocharā	Rāmacandra	1625—1650	Kamrup.
Khutiyapotā	Kṛṣṇadeva	1630—	Sibsagar.
Kāṭanipār	Sunanda	1725—1775	Sibsagar.
Kāthpār	Puruṣottama	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Korekhanā	A descendant of Saru-Yadumaṇi	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Korachguri	Yadumaṇi	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Leṅgdi	Mokṣadeva	1675—1725	Sibsagar.
Loacūḍa	Gopāla Ātā	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Madārguri	A descendant of Saru-Yadumani	1700—1750	Sibsagar Nowgong.
Madārkhāṭ	Candrakānta	1880	Lakhimpur
Māgurmarā	A descendant of Saru-Yadumani.	1700—1750	
Mahariyāl	Anupam Bāpu	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Mairāmarā	Bar-Kṛṣṇa	1675—1700	Sibsagar.
Medhijān	A descendant of Saru-Yadumaṇi.	1700—1725	Sibsagar.
Nācanīpār	Rāmānanda	1650—1675	Nowgong, Sibsagar.
Nogarīyā	Sanātana	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Nāharkatīyā	A descendant of Srīrāma Ātā	1650—1700	Sibsagar.
Na-māti	Srīkānta	1650—1700	Sibsagar Lakhimpur.
Paghādharā	A descendant of Nārāyaṇa of Dāhghariya	1725	Sibsagar.
Pahumarā	A disciple of Śrīrama Atā	1650—1700	Nowgong
Pukhuripār	Ramākanta	1675—1700	Sibsagar.
Puraṇipāṃ	Madhuramūrti	1683	Lakhimpur Sibsagar.

Name of Satra.	Founder.	Time of foundation.	Location.*x*
Puraṇimāṭi	A disciple of Ramāi of Cecā Satra	1700—1725	Sibsagar.
Puthiparhā	A disciple of Saru-Yadumaṇi.	1675	Sibsagar.
Rājanakhāt	A discendant of Saru-Yadumani.	1700—1750	— — —
Śākopār	Rāmacandra	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Śarmarā	Jagadhara	1700—1725	Sibsagar.
Saukājān	A descendant of Saru-Yadumaṇi	1700—1725	Sibsagar.
*Silikhātal	Sanātanadeva	165—1675	Sibsagar & Lakhimpur.
Soṇāripār	A descendant of Saru-Yadumaṇi	1700—1725	Sibsagar.
Telpāṇī	Narabaradeva	1700—1725	Sibsagar.
Thorāmukhīyā	A descendant of Saru-Yadumaṇi	1700—1750	Sibsagar.

(C) PURUSA SAMHATI

Āi-bheti	Śasadhara Ṭhākur	1650—1700	Nowgong.
Auwā		1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Bāhjengani	Svarupānanda	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Bāli (Naroa)	Dāmodara Ṭhākur	1650—1675	Nowgong.
Balit	Mādhavānanda	1675—1700	
Bāli-Pukhuri	Jivadhan	1750—1800	Sibsagar & Darrang.
Bagi-Ai		1700—1725	Sibsagar.
Bangāon	Deurāma	1650—1675	Kamrup.
*Bardowā	Dāmodara Ṭhākur	1650—1675	Nowgong.
Bargāon	Rāmanātha	1750—1800	Da*h*rang.
Barālimarā	Madhusūdana		Darrang.
Bar-Gomorā	A disciple of Chaturbhuja Ṭhakur	1630—166z	Kamrup.
Bar-Sukdal	Bhagati Āta	1750—1800	Nowgong.
Bar-Elengi	Kṛṣṇānanda	1675—1700	
Batārgāyā	Paramānanda	1650—1625	Sibsagar.
Belaguri			Sibsagar.
Belśirīyā	Sanātana	1630—1660	Sibsagar.
*Beṅgenā-āti	Murāri	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Bhāgati	A descendant of Bāpu-Kṛṣṇa of Elengi.	1700—1750	Sibsagar & Darrang.
Bhāguwāl	Viṣṇudeva	1630—1660	
Bhogpur			Sibsagar.

Name of Satra.	Founder.	Time of foundation.	Location.
Bihampur	Govinda Bāpu	1630—1660	Sibsagar & Kamrup.
*Cāmaguri	Cakrapāṇi	1660—1675	Sibsagar & Nowgong.
Catamiyā	Vāsudeva Bāpu	1625—1650	Nowgong.
Cekerātali	Gopinātha	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Cuṅgāpārā	Kānāi Ātai	1630—1660	Sibsagar.
*Cupahā	Kṛṣṇacaraṇa	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Dāṅgdharā	— — —	1750—1800	Sibsagar.
Dikhaumukhīyā	— — —	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
*Dighali	Śārangapāṇi	1650—8675	Sibsagar. Nowgong.
Dokharāmukh	Jagatānanda	1650—1675	
*lEengí	Bāpukṛṣṇa	1630—1650	Sibsagar.
Gatamiyā	Jayagovinda	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Gharkatiyā	Jaya-Kṛṣṇa	163z—1660	
Ghilājharī	Caturbhuja Ṭhākur	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Gomothā-Māhārā	Rāma-Kṛṣṇa	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Gonāmarā	Bikārām	1825—1840	Nowgong.
Gobhir	Jaya-Kānāi	1630—1660	
Hāladhi-āti	Mukunda	1630—1660	Kamrup & Sibsagar.
Itākhuli	Viswanatha	1800	Nowgong.
*Janiyā	Nārāyana Thakur	1575—1606	Kamrup.
Kadobāhi	Ramākānta	1675—1725	Sibsagar.
Kaicung	Kesavacaraṇa	1625—1650	Nowgong.
Kājiraṅgā			Sibsagar.
Kākarikaṭā	A descendant of Bāpu-Kṛṣṇa of Elengi Satra	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Kālsilā	Ananta Ātā	1652	Nowgong.
Kāmjān	A descendant of Bāpu-Kṛṣṇa.	170z—1750	Sibsagar.
Kamalābāri	Gopalacaraṇa	— — —	Kamrup.
Kaṅkilā		— — —	Sibsagar.
Kantari	Raghupati	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Karati	Harigati	1650—1675	Sibsagar & Nowgong.
Kāthpār	Kamalalocana	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Kāthargrām	Paramānanda	1650—1675	Darrang& Sibsagar.

Name of Satra.	Founder.	Time of foundation.	Location.
Kāthbāpu	A descendant of Mukundadeva	1650—1700	Sibsagar.
Kāwaimāri	Gopinatha	1630—1660	Darrang & Sibsagar.
Kaupatiyā	Ramacarana	1650—1675	Lakhimpur
Khātpār	Sankara-gati	1700—1725	Sibsagar.
Kherkatiyā		1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Khedāpārā			Lakhimpur
Khundāmarā	Narottama	1700—1750	Nowgong.
*Koāmarā	Anantaraya	1640—1675	Sibsagar.
Kuji	Damodara Ātā	1660	Nowgong..
Laksmipur	Raghupati	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Letugrām	Kṛṣṇacaraṇa	1700—1725	Sibsagar. Nowgong.
Madārguri	Ramākanta & Ramānanda	1700—1725	Sibsagar & Nowgong.
Mādhatāri	Madhavanarayana	1650—1700	Nowgong.
Micimi	Haricarana	1650—1675	Sibsagar
Nācanipār	Rāmabhadra	1630—1660	Sibsagar.
Nācpār	Rāmaśobhana	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Nalatīyā	Gopikānta	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Nikāmul	Lakṣmandeva	1700—1725	Darrang.
*Narowā	Dāmodara Ātā	1650—1675	Sibsagar & Lakhimpur.
Narasimha	Narasimha	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Nāokatā	Bhubaneswara	1650—1675	Nowgong.
Nepāli	Ratikānta	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Pālengdi			Kamrup.
Pasāri	Kṛṣṇagrahana	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
*Pāṭbausī	Śankaradeva	1550—1568	Kamrup.
Pāṭkatīyā	Srirāma	1650—1675	
Porābheti	Purtamcarana	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Puniyā	Paraśurama	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Rangāpani	A descendant of		Goalpara.
Ratanpur	Paramananda	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Ratnākar	Ratnākara	1650—1675	Sibsagah.
Rupnārāyaṇ	Padmanārāyaṇa	1775—1800	Nowgong.
*Śalaguri (I)	Ratnākara	1630—1660	Sibsagar.
*Śalaguri (I)	Anantarāya	1650—1675	Sibsagar
Sālmariyā	Kṛṣṇa	1650 1675	Sibsagar & Lakhimpur.
Sāokuchi	Haricarana	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Sārjapīyā	A descendant of Bāpu-Kṛṣṇa of Elengi	1700—1750	

Name of Satra.	Founder.	Time of foundation	Location.
Sikārhati	A disciple of Chaturbhuja Thākur		Kamrup.
Sukdal	Hariyara	1675—1700	Nowgong.
Silpotā	Kānu Ātā		Kamrup.
Takaubāri	A descendant of Bāpu-Kṛṣṇa	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Takaubāri	Bipra Ātāi	1790—1800	Kamrup.
Thakuriyāl	Kamala-locana	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Thukubil	Abhimanyu	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Tunikāṣar	A descendant of Bāpu-Kṛśṇa	1700—1750	Lakhimpur.
Ulutali	A descendant of Bāpu-Kṛṣṇa.	1700—1750	Sibsagar.
Uzaniyāl	Kanu Ātai	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Viṣṇupur	Caturbhuja Thākur	1600—1625	Goalpara.

(D) **NIKA SAMHATI**

Auguri	A disciple of Padma Ātā	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Baguān	— — —	— — —	Goalpara.
Bārādi	Nārāyaṇa Ṭhakur	1580—1600	Kamrup.
Barbārī		— — —	Darrang & Lakhimpur.
Barbhithā	Gadadhara	1600—1625	Kamrup.
*Barjahā	Kesavacarana Ātā	1500—1625	Darrang Nowgong.
*Barpetā	Mādhavadeva	1570—1590	Kamrup.
Bālijana	Narahari Ātai	1650—1675	Goalpara.
Bhāṭokuchi	Kesavcarana Ātā	1600—1625	Lakhimpur.
Bāmuna	Daityari Ṭhākur	1625—1650	Kamrup.
*Bhelā	Mādhavadeva	1590—1596	Cooch-Beha Behar.
Bhogpur	Dāmodara Ātā	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Cakalā	Kesavacarana Ātā	1625—1650	Sibsagar & Lakhimpur.
*Camarīyā	Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā	1580—1620	Kamrup.
Cāpari	— — —	— — —	Sibsagar.
Capātalā	Kamala-locana	1750A.D.	Kamrup.
Cikārhāti	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
Cinātali	— — —	— — —	Sibsagar.
Cirājuli	Kṛṣṇa Ātai	1650—1700	Darrang
Dadhi	Laksmīkānta	1580—1620	Kamrup.

Name of Satra.	Founder.	Time of foundation.	Location.
Dalaiguri	Beherua Visnu Atā	1580—1620	Kamrup.
Dalgomā	Rāmacarana Ṭhākur	1600—1625	Goalpara.
Dhakuāpār	— — —	— — —	Lakhimpur
Dharmapur		1820—1830	Goalpara.
Dhopguri	Laksmikanta	1595—1620	Kamrup.
Diṅgānagar	A descendant of Nārāyana Thākur	— — —	Goalpara.
Dumdumīyā	— — —	— — —	Nowgong.
Ganak-kuchi	Mādhavdeva	1550—1575	Kamrup.
Guāgācha	Ramacharaṇa Ṭhākur	1600A.D.	Kamrup.
Haripur	A branch of Camariya	— — —	Kamrup.
Hari-pukhuri	Padma Ātā	1600—1625	Lakhimpur
Hātīmūrā	Vanamāli Ātāi	1650—1700	Kamrup.
*Herāmad	ParhiyāĀtai	1595—1625	Kamrup.
Jarābārī	Śrīkānta	1650—1675	Sibsagar.
Jaypur	Beheruā V'ṣṇurĀtā	— — —	— — —
Jāmalai	Daityāri Ṭhākur	1625—1650	Goalpara.
Jikāpura	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
*Kaimāri	BalorāmaĀtai	1650—1700	Kamrup.
*Kamalābāri	Padma Ata	1595—1625	Sibsagar.
Kharāimarīyā	A disciple of Padma Āta	1625—1650	
Khaṭarā	Govinda Atai	1595—1625	Kamrup & Darrang.
Khekāpārā	A descendant of Ramacarana Thākur		Goalpara.
Komorākaṭā	A disciple of Padma Ātā	1625—1650	Darrang.
Katalkuchi	Govinda Atai	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Kurhimāri	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
Lāi-āti	Śrīhari Ātai	1600—1625	Nowgong.
Lāitali	Jayakānta	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Madhupura	Mādhavadeva	1592—1595	Cooch-Behar.
Maharīyā	A descendant of a Khatarā Govinda	1625—1650	Kamrup.
Māh-āti	A disciple of Padma Atā	1625—1650	
Mainbārī	A descendant of Nārāyana Thākur	1625—1650	Kamrup.
Mājetiyā	Harihara Ātā	1595—1625	Kamrup.
Mājbāṭ	Govinda Atai	1625—1650	Darrang.
Mālibārī			
Māṇikpura	Manikbariyā Kṛṣṇa	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Mudaibheṭi	Padma Atā	1600—1625	Lakhimpur & Darrang.

Name of Satra.	Founder.	Time of foundation	Location.
Nahirā	Sarurāma Bāpu	1800—1825	Kamrup.
Nāokaṭā	Rāmacaraṇa Thākur.	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Na-satra	A Successor of Padma Ātā	1850—1875	Sibsagar.
Na-Sastra	— — —	— — —	Kamrup.
Orpot	Parhiyā-Mādhava	1600—1650	Kamrup.
Pānbārī			Kamrup.
Phulguri	Parhiyā-Mādhava	1600—1625	Kamrup.
Raghunāth	Bar-Hari Ātai	— — —	Kamrup.
Raumāri		— — —	Goalpara.
Rangāpānī	A descendant of Ṭhākur Atā	— — —	Goalpara.
Sakājān	A disciple of Padma Atā	1625—1650	
Saru-Herāmad	Gopāla Ātai	1650—1700	Kamrup.
Saru-Phulguri	A descendant of Parhiyā-Madhava		Kamrup.
Satrasāl	Rāmrāya	1550—1575	Goalpara.
Śilpatīyā	A disciple of Padma Ātā	1625—1650	Sibsagar.
Śuāl-kuchi	A disciple of Padma Ātā	1625—1650	Kamrup.
Sundarīdiyā	Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur	1575—1600	Kamrup.
Takaubāri	A disciple of Padma Ātā	1625—1650	Kamrup.
Tāntikuchi			Kamrup.
Tāmraṅgiyā	A disciple of Padma Ātā	1625—1650	
Ṭhukuryīā		1625—1650	Sibsagar·
Ṭhākurbārī	Balarāma	1625—1658	Kamrup

GLOSSARIAL INDEX

Ācārya : A preceptor ; a spiritual guide.

Adhikāra : The head of a satra ;

Āldharā : A personal attendant (As. *āl*=attendance).

Āmai : Mother's equal ; it is a term of address applied to the wife of one's father's sacramental friend. (Sk. *Ambā*=mother).

Aṅkiyā-nāta : One-act devotional plays written by Vaisnavite saints. (Sk. *Aṅka*=an act, a type of drama).

Ātā : Grand-father ; it is a designation applied to Vaiṣṇavite saints (Sk. *Atma-*).

Ātai : A venerable person ; A celibate devotee attached to a satra. (Sk. *Atma-*).

Āṭh-parīyā : A watcher ; one who keeps vigil (*Āṭh*=Sk. *Aṣṭa ; par*=Sk. *prahara*).

Avidyā : Ignorance.

Baraṅgaṅi : Subscription for religious ceremonies and festivals.

Bargīta : A class of devotional songs attuned to classical *Rāgas.*

Bhārālī : A store-keeper ; (Sk. *Bhāṇḍāgārika*).

Bhajana : The ceremony of ordination after the first initiation to Vaisnavism.

Bhakat : A devotee ; (Sk. *Bhakta*).

Bhaṭimā : A devotional song employed in the *Aṅkiyā-nāta ;* (Sk. *Bhāṭa*).

Bhāgatī : An expositor of the *Bhāgavata Puraṇa* (Sk. *Bhāgavatī*).

Bāhar : Temporary huts in a village to accommodate Satra heads and disciples on tour (*vāsa+gṛha*).

Bāp : Father ; a term of address applied to Vaisnavite saints or satra heads.

Bāṭcarā : A gate-house ; an out-house of the satra, (As. *bāṭ*=way, *carā*=a hall).

Bāyana : a leader of the party of instrumental players.

Bhāonā : A religious performance ; a dramatic show of Vaiṣṇavite dramas.

Bheṭi-dharā : The receiver of gifts and presents to the satra ; [*bheti* (reward)+ *dharā* (receiver)].

Brahma : Absolute God.

Cahar : An ecclesiastical area ; a diocese. Several villages constitute one *Cahar* under the supervision of one *Barmedhi.*

Carita-puthi : A biography of Vaiṣṇavite saints.

Cāri Vastu : The four fundamental principles, *viz., Nāma, Deva, Guru, Bhakat.*

Daśama : Book X of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* wherein the life of Kṛṣṇa has been depicted.

Deurī : A priest ; a worshipper (Sk. *Devagṛhika*).

Dīkṣā : An initiation according to Tantric or Puranic method.

Dharmācārya : Proselytisers who were authorised by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva to initiate person and propagate the cult.

Dhemāli : A preliminary orchestral music in a *Bhāonā* performance.

Dhop : A garland of Tulasi leaves.

Eka-śaraṇa : The supreme surrender to one God.

Eṭakā-Mahanta : A Mahanta of a traditionally recognised satra. During the reign of king Rudra Siṁha it is said that he made a survey of satras and fixed the number at a rupee value (*eṭakā*). This means that each satra formed a part of a rupee which then consisted of 64 pices or 1280 cowries. A Mahanta or the head of a satra which was included in the recognised list was considered as a member of *Eṭakā-Mahanta.* The exact number of satras, whether sixtyfour or twelve hundred and eighty, is not definitely known.

Ghoṣa : Refrain ; the *Nāmaghoṣā* by Mādhavadeva is also popularly known as *Ghoṣā* : (Sk. √ *ghuṣ*=to sing aloud).

Gosāin : A religious preceptor who is versed in the Vedas. The heads of Vaiṣṇavite satras are popularly called Gosain (*Goswāmin*).

Hāṭi : Rows of huts where devotees are lodged in a satra are collectively known as *Hāṭi* (Sk. *Haṭṭa*=market).

Haribhakat : A fellow devotee of Hari. It is a term of mutual address by persons initiated simultaneously.

Hāṭimatā : The leading devotee of a particular *Hāṭi.*

Kalā-Śaṁhati : A sub-sect of the Mahāpuruṣīyā cult initiated by Gopāl Ātā.

Kar : Religious tithe due to satra from its disciples annually.

Karāpāt : *Vide Bāṭcarā ;* a gate or a gate-house.

Kathā : Prose ; the word *kathā* is generally prefixed to the title of works written in prose, e.g., *Kathā-Gitā, Kathā-Bhāgavata* etc.

Kewalīyā : A celibate devotee ; one whose only occupation of life is the rendering of service to God. (Sk. *Kevalin*).

Kīrtana : The act of chanting prayers ; it is the name of a devotional Kāvya by Śaṅkaradeva.

Mahanta : A noble man ; non-Brahmin heads of satras are popularly called *Mahanta* (*Mahat*).

Mahāpuruṣa : Literally the Great Being, i.e., God ; Śaṅkaradeva is popularly known as *Mahāpuruṣa.*

Malīyā : A functionary of the satra in charge of garland and rosary. (*Mālā+iyā*)

Maṇikūṭa : The shrine where the Sacred Scripture or the idol of the deity is installed.

Maṭak : Disciples of the Māyāmariyā Gosain are popularly designated as *Maṭak* because of their strength and fanatical devotion to their Guru.

Māyamarā or *Moāmariyā* : The Satra founded by Aniruddhadeva and disciples of the same satra are called by this name. It is a branch of the Kalā Śaṁhati.

Māyā : Illusion, ignorance.

Medhi : A functionary appointed by the satra to look after the affairs in a village. (Sk. *Medhāvin*).

Nām (*Nāma*) : Names and attributes of God.

Nam-añjaniya : A functionary of the satra in charge of training newly initiated persons in the cult. The word *añjana* means collyrium ; an *añjaniyā,* therefore, is one who colours the mind a person with collyrium of devotion.

Nāmaghar : A prayer-hall.

Nāmā-lagowā : One who leads or initiates the congregational prayer.

Nāma-prasaṅga : Devotional services consisting of prayers, recitations and religious discussions.

Naṭuwā : A dancer, a performer. (√*naṭ*).

Nivṛtti-mārga : The path of selfless or desireless devotion.

Nikā Saṁhati : Sub-sect organised by Padma Āta, and Mathuradāsa.

Ojā : An expert ; the leader of choral singers. (Sk. *Upādhyāya*).

Ojā-pāli : A pre-Sankarite choral performance where episodes from Purāṇas were recited accompanied by dance and music.

Pāli : An assistant to the Ojā. The right-hand assistant is called *Daiṇā-pāli.*

Pācanī : A functionary of the satra engaged on various errands.

Pacati : A festival celebrated on the fifth day of the birth anniversary of Kṛṣṇa. (Sk. *Pañcatikā*).

Pāik : Persons who had to render specific services to the State or to the satra. Four persons constituted one *Paik*. Each had to render three months' service to the State or to the satra to which he was attached.

Pravṛtti-mārga : The religious path dominated by ideas of worldly pursuits.

Pūjārī : A worshipper, a priest. (Sk. *Pūjākāri*).

Puruṣārtha : The four ideals of life according to the Hindus. They are *Dharma, Artha, Kāma,* and *Mokṣa.*

Puruṣa Śaṁhati : The sub-sect organised by Purusottama Ṭhākur.

Sabāh : Religious congregation where prayer services are held (Sk. *Sabhā*).

Saṁhati : Association ; a sect.

Śaraṇa : The initiation ceremony in which a neophyte is required to surrender himself absolutely to the four fundamental principles.

Śarāi : A brass tray having artistically carved stand (Sk. *śarāva*).

Sāt-saṅga : A holy association.

Sāj-tolā : A village functionary appointed by the satra to collect materials for specific purposes.

Sidhā : Uncooked eatables supplied to a satra by disciples on ceremonial occasions or things supplied to guest for the purpose of cooking.

Sic : A disciple ; (*śiṣya*).

Śravanī : A person appointed by the satra with the specific duty of listening to the recitation of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa.*

Satrīyā : The head of a satra holding a limited authority.

Tāwai : Equal to one's father ; it is a form of address applied to the sacramental friend of one's father. (Sk. *tāta*=Father).

Thāpanā : Holy altar whereon the sacred scripture is kept.

Tithi : Literally a lunar day ; it also denotes birth and death anniversaries of Vaiṣṇavite saints.

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